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ATLAS OF  
THE LACCADIVE, MINICOY AND AMINDIVI ISLANDS







# ATLAS

OF

## THE LACCADIVE, MINICOY AND AMINDIVI ISLANDS

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

SHRI MURKOT RAMUNNY  
*Administrator, Union Territory of Laccadives*

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## P R E F A C E

Unknown and neglected by the outside World, the Islands in the Arabian Sea had stood still for centuries. After India's Independence in 1947, contact with the mainland increased. From 1956 onwards, when the Union Government took over the Administration, the Islands have made rapid strides in all fields of Development. This Atlas is mainly meant for the people of the rest of the Country to know more about the Islands of the Arabian Sea.

A hand-written copy was taken by the Administrator to DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN, President of India. It was his orders that it should be printed and published.

We are thankful to the Madras Government for giving us facilities and priority at the Government Press, Madras, as well as the Central Survey office. The staff of these two institutions have gone out of the way to help us in producing this publication. We are grateful to them.

The maps have been produced by the Survey Department of the Administration. They have taken special interest in the production of this Atlas. We are grateful to the Burmah-Shell for allowing us to reproduce the colour pictures of the fish in the lagoons.

We hope an Atlas like this will enlighten those who mix up Andamans and Laccadives even to-day.

M. RAMUNNY,  
*Administrator, Union Territory of Laccadives.*



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## INTRODUCTION

The natural beauty of the Himalayas has been described a thousand times ; the man-made masterpiece Taj Mahal has been photographed millions of times ; but we present to you for the first time the unknown beauty spots of the Arabian Sea — the Laccadives.

The Coral Islands of the Arabian Sea known as Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands are nineteen in number excluding the bird Island of Pitti. Out of these, ten are inhabited and others are dependant islands and are cultivated. They lie about 120 to 200 miles off the Kerala Coast between  $8^{\circ}$  and  $12^{\circ}-30'$  North latitude and between  $71^{\circ}$  and  $74^{\circ}$  East longitude.

These Islands lie generally from north to south except Androth which lies east to west. They are long and narrow and are thickly populated in the widest part. Every island has a lagoon on its western side and a storm beach on its eastern side. The lagoons protect the islands on their most exposed side from the fury of the south-west monsoon. No part of the islands is more than 10 to 30 feet above sea level.

All the Islands are coconut gardens. Bread fruit trees also grow in abundance. In fact, they are known in Kerala as "Island jack fruit". In some places the tamarind, the banyan and a few lime trees and areca palms are seen. Screwpine grows luxuriously in most of the islands. There are no wild animals. But rats are a menace to coconut cultivation. There are no snakes in the Islands. Fish are abundant around the Islands and the smaller ones in the lagoons have very brilliant colours. The world famous Tuna, particularly the skip jack is found in large shoals in the deep seas around all the Islands.

The early history is merged into legend. The first colonisers were Hindus from Kerala Coast. Even now they have some of the ancient customs and caste distinctions of the Hindus of Kerala. They seem to have been converted about the 13th and 14th centuries.

During the fifteenth century, the Portuguese came and settled in one of the Islands. The islanders sought the help of the Chirakkal Raja of Cannanore to get out of the clutches of the Portuguese. Chirakkal Raja himself seems in course of time to have passed on his supremacy over the Islands to the Muslim rulers of Arakkal in Cannanore. By the middle of 18th century, the Cannanore House was supreme in all the Islands. In 1786, the northern Islands revolted against the stringency of the trade monopolies enforced by the Arakkal Raja. By the treaty of Sreerangapattanam in 1792, Tippu's entire dependencies in Malabar were ceded to the company. The Islands thus came under the direct rule of the British Company. The southern group of Islands also came under British rule consequent to the fall of Cannanore in 1793, but were retained by the Cannanore House as a Jagir under the British. Finally in 1908 by agreement with the Cannanore House, the Islands became part of British India. The northern Islands were administered by the Collector of South Kanara and the southern Islands by the Collector of Malabar.

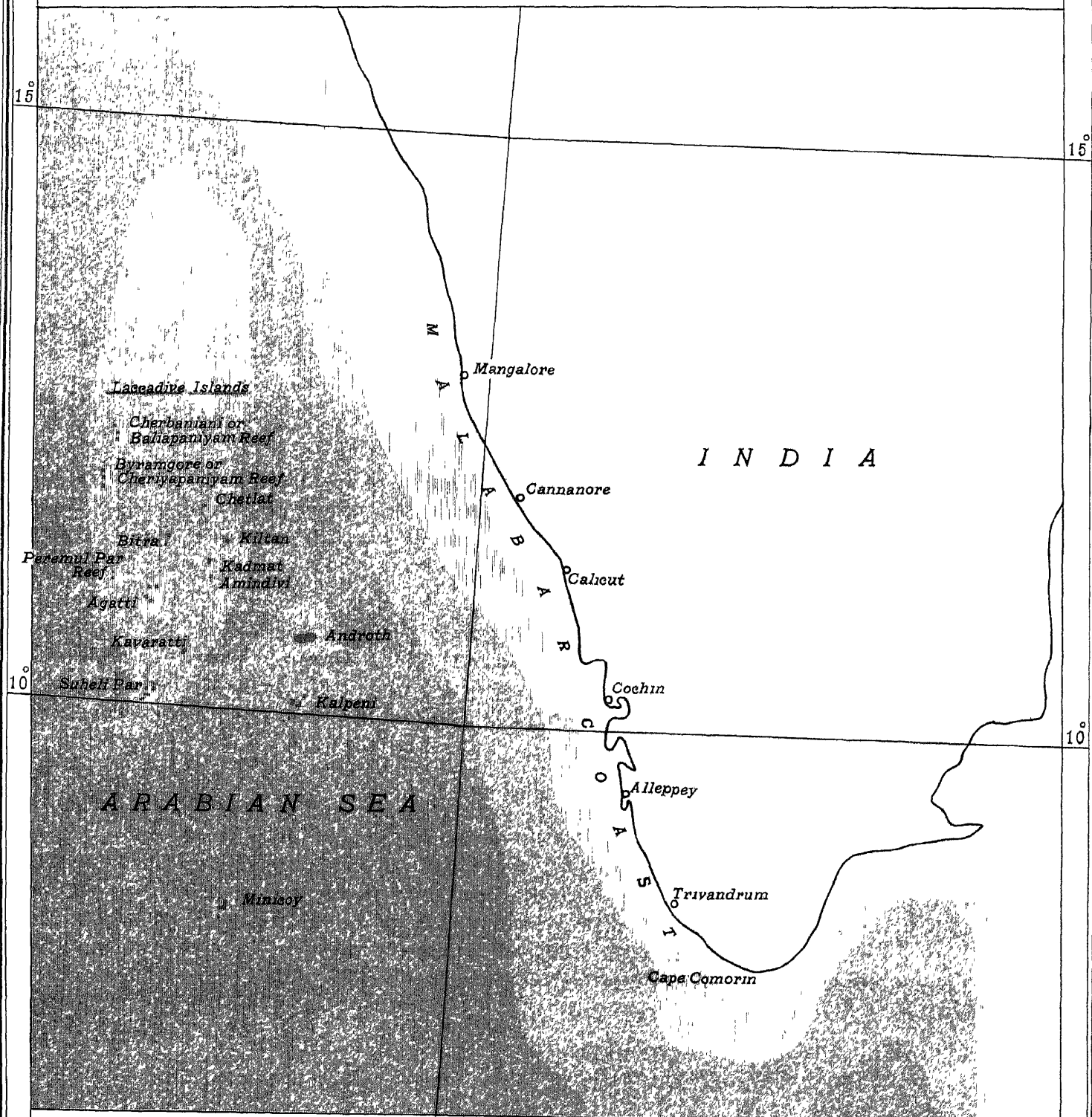
This administrative arrangement continued after independence in 1947. But after the States' Reorganisation, the Islands were constituted as a Union Territory on 1st November 1956.



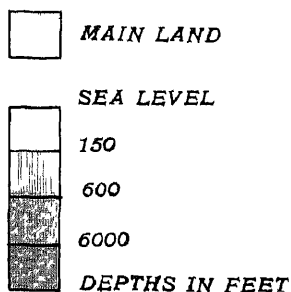
# THE LACCADIVE ISLANDS

(IN RELATION TO THE WEST COAST OF INDIA)

SCALE 1 INCH = 79 MILES  
(1 CM. = 50 KM.)



## REFERENCE



# THE LACCADIVE ISLANDS

*(IN RELATION TO THE WEST COAST OF INDIA)*

On the outline map of India, the Laccadives look like one of nature's afterthoughts. Far flung and isolated, they provide a protective barrier to the 2,000 mile long West Coast of India. Though the Islands suffered natural isolation from the rest of India for a major portion of the year, mutual contacts between the two have been continuous.

Ever since Hippalus in A.D. 45 sailed with the monsoon wind to discover the direct route across the Arabian Sea from Arabia to the West Coast of India, the Laccadives must have been put on the ocean map of the world. Periplus Maris Erythraei attributed to the same period refers to the tortoise shells of Laccadives as one of the major exports from Limurike or Tamilakam. The Arab geographers of a later era called this part of the Arabian sea as the sea of Larawī (Laccadives). Masudi, the great traveller, has recorded that Ambar grows in abundance in this area and that they were available in different hues-black, white and dark bay colour. The Islands would thus seem to have been visited by coastal adventurers in search of marine wealth, even before permanent settlement took place.

With the arrival of the Portuguese on the Indian seas the Laccadives attained added importance. In the bloody sea battles fought in the Arabian sea between the West Coast rulers and the Portuguese, these Islands provided a vantage point for military operations and for dodging the enemy.

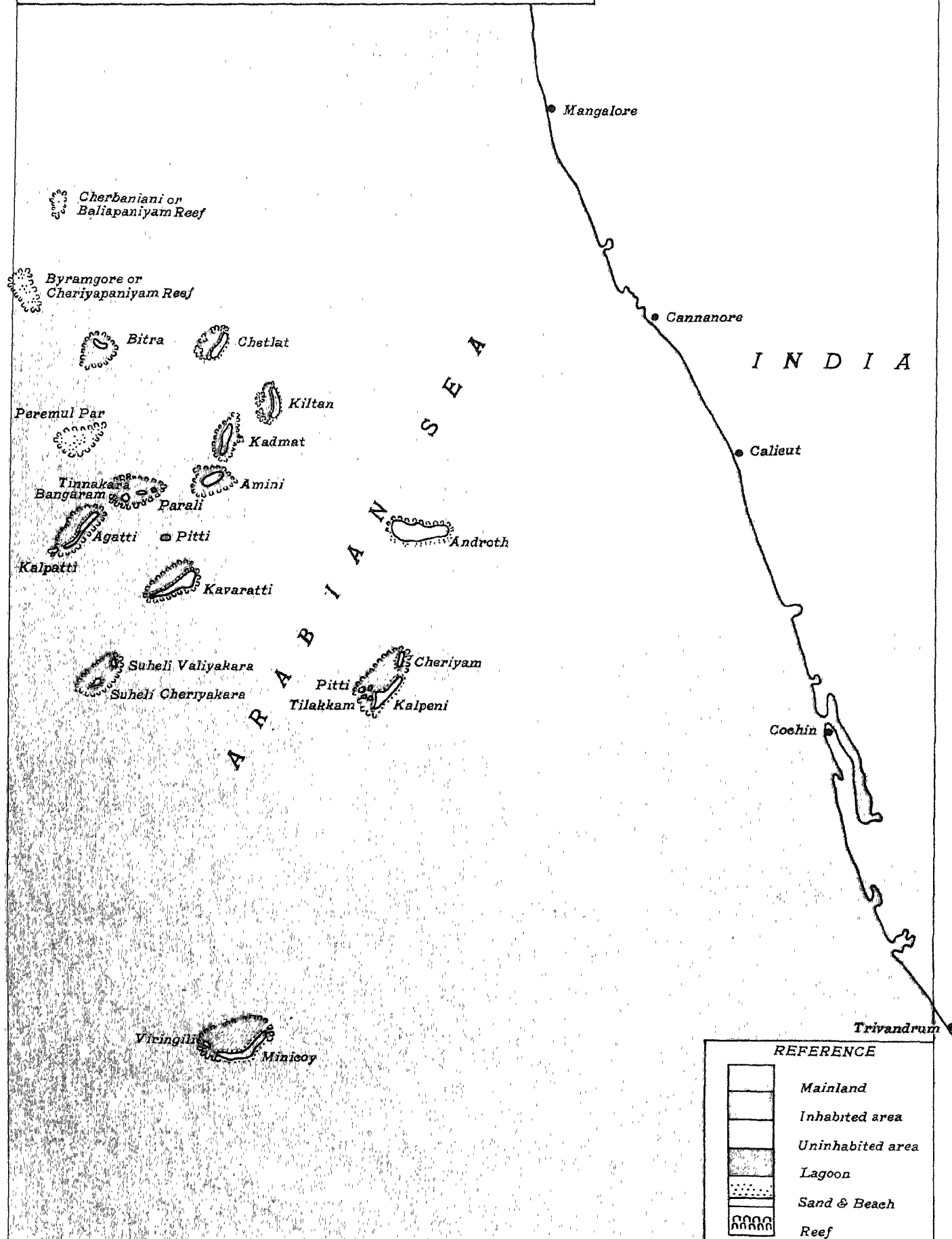
An oceanic people, the Islanders are essentially good sailors. Trading relations with the coast seem to have been established early, and Island vessels visited Surat, Muscat and other ports. Minicoy vessels went further round the Cape and had a flourishing trade with Maldives, Ceylon and Bengal. Trading vessels from the mainland also came to these Islands, but this was prohibited when the Rajas of Cannanore brought the entire trade of the Islands under their control by the middle of the 18th century. The alliance with the Cannanore Raja was beneficial to the Islands against the ocean pirates, but it restricted their trade channels and consequently their wider outlook and contacts.

A few Island vessels are reported to have called at Goa every year to bring duty-free salt from that port till about the end of the last century. The Bengal trade survived in a salutary manner till the beginning of the present century.

To-day, the Islands are entirely dependant on the mainland for their food requirements. When the fury of the south-west monsoon is over the sailing crafts laden with coir, copra or dry fish set sail to the coast. The time taken for the voyage varies from three to upwards of ten days depending on wind. They now sail to the port of their own choice—the port where they are assured of the best price for their produce. To the northern Islanders, Mangalore and Coondapoor are more convenient. Others come to Calicut, while Minicoy Islanders still prefer Cannanore. To-day, the steamer supplements the meagre provisions brought by sailing vessels. The steamer service has also reduced the period of isolation of these Islands during the monsoon from five months in a year to less than a month.

# EYE SKETCH OF THE ISLANDS

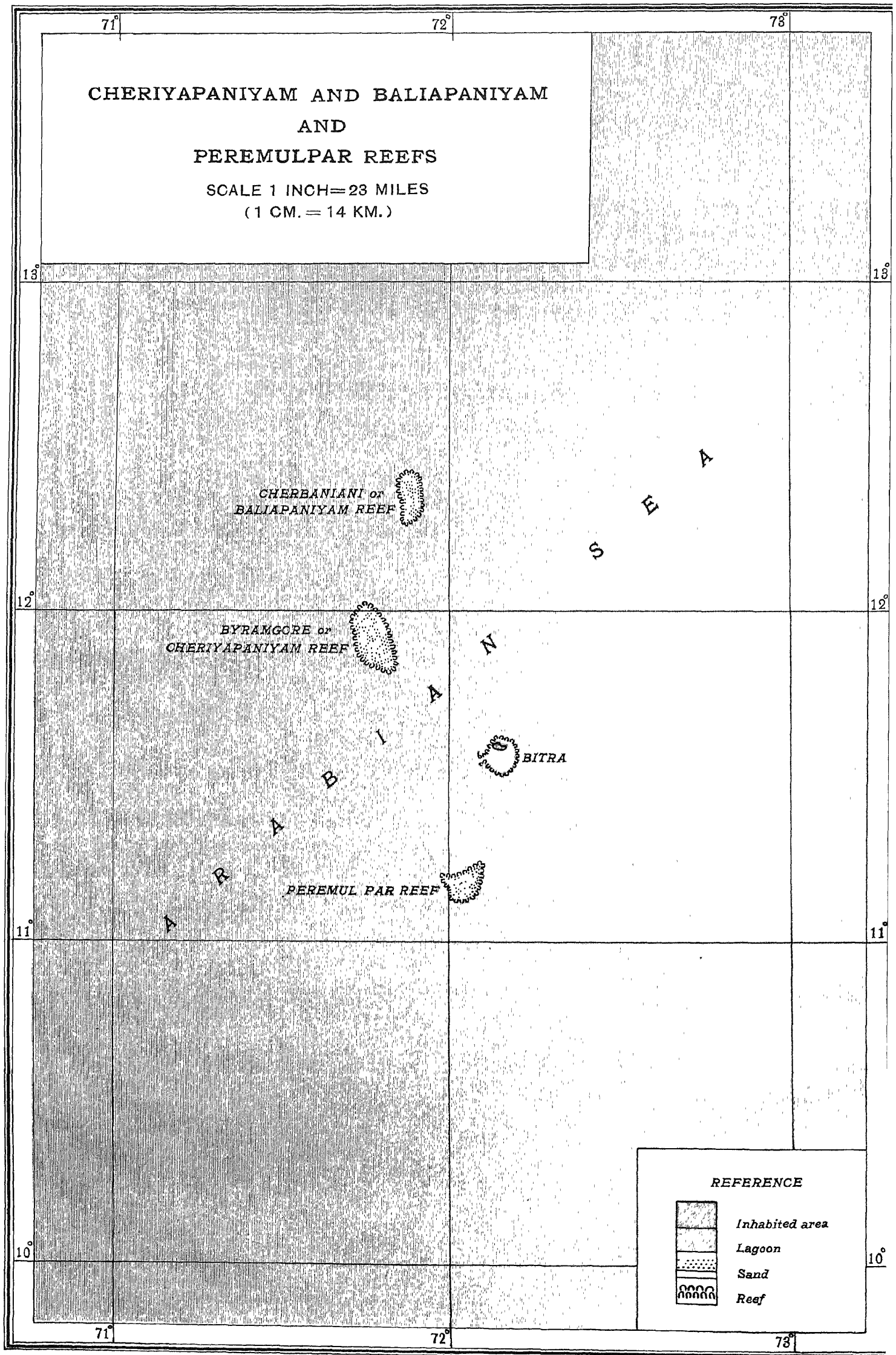
(NOT TO SCALE)



*Distance in Kilo-Metres between Islands*

*Calicut*

198	<i>Androth</i>										
282	93	<i>Amini</i>									
282	103	10	<i>Kadmat</i>								
333	159	69	63	<i>Bitra</i>							
286	122	56	47	48	<i>Chetlat</i>						
257	88	51	42	77	32	<i>Kiltan</i>					
333	137	53	63	69	90	97	<i>Agatti</i>				
301	103	56	66	108	109	100	50	<i>Kavaratti</i>			
338	143	100	109	145	153	146	71	47	<i>Suhelipar</i>		
230	76	130	138	198	179	153	154	108	122	<i>Kalpeni</i>	
386	254	270	278	326	328	301	257	219	190	183	<i>Minicoy</i>



# CHERIYA PANIYAM AND BALIYA PANIYAM AND PEREMUL PAR

The three open reefs of Cherbaniani, Byramgore and Peremul par are situated between 11° and 12°-30' North latitude and 71°-30' and 72° East longitude. Byramgore and Peremul par are submerged reefs, while Cherbaniani has sand banks on its north and east sides.

Cherbaniani or Baliya Paniyam is the northernmost reef of the Laccadives. It is situated north-eastward from Byramgore reef and separated by a very deep channel. In 1894, it was reported that at the southern end of the reef there was a sand cay and there were an islet and some sand banks on its eastern and northern sides, but the greater part of the Barrier reef is only visible in low water.

Mr. A. O. Hume who visited this atoll in February 1885, found the noddy and the sooty tern breeding, but Alcock in October 1891 could not even find so much as an egg shell. Alcock described the atoll as "an emerald disk girdled by a ring of snow-white foam". The emerald disk was the lagoon and the white that encircled it was the surf breaking upon the submerged atoll. This surf, which only the turtles seem to enjoy makes landing a matter of much inconvenience at all times. Alcock found the place desolate. "Almost all the coral that I saw was dead. Not a sign of a plant or even of a cast up seed or nut was visible, and the only animals to be seen, besides a flock of sand pipers and an occasional bosun bird, were hermit crabs of the genus coenobita and grapsoids and crabs of the genera, Grapsus and Oeypoda. Even the lagoon supported but little life, but there were plenty of seaweeds in it."

During the visit of the Administrator Shri M. Ramunny and party in 1963 which was the first recorded visit of any officials to this reef, it was found that there were five small banks or islets forming an Atoll around a lagoon about 25 square miles in area. On the eastern side at the middle of the reef, there was one black rock visible about 10 miles away. There were two clear boat passages to the north eastern side and to the south into the lagoon. There were large flocks of terns and sooties but no eggs were found in October. Plenty of newly hatched little ones which were still under the protection of bigger birds were seen. Different types of eels were also found. The biggest islet on the western side was surrounded by a coral reef while the eastern ones were white sand banks. It is reported by fishermen that there are fast currents during the nights near the reef particularly during the change of monsoons.

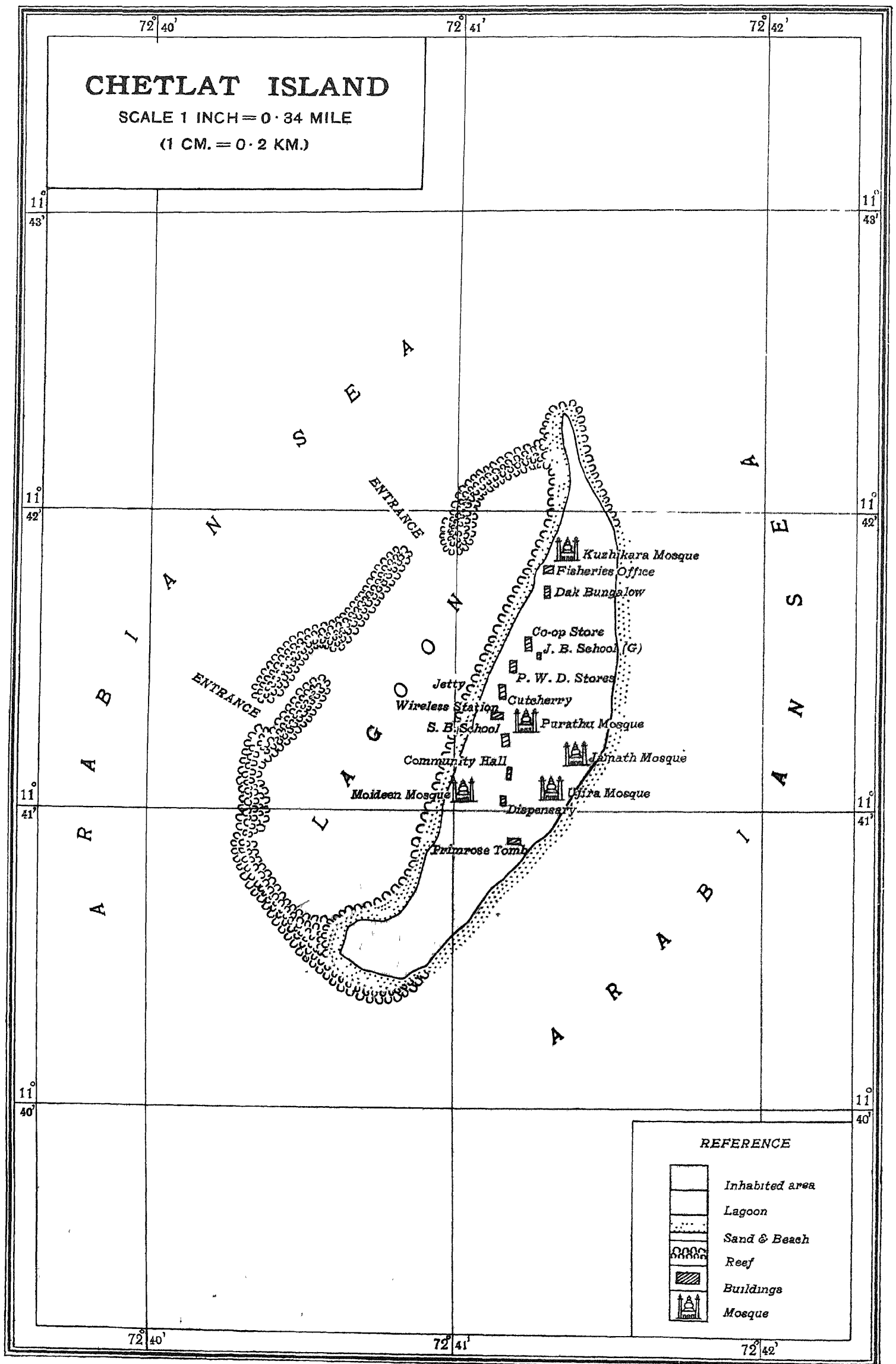
Byramgore reef or Cheriyanani reef are sunken reefs except for the south-eastern point which is seen during low time. In the year 1828, it is reported that the ship "*BYRAMGORE*" bound from China to Bombay laden with silver, silk, etc., was lost on this reef to which she has given her name.

In 1844, the "Ceylon" bound from England to Bombay laden with food stuff piece-goods, cutlery, etc., was wrecked on the Cherbaniani reef. Sir Robinson who salvaged this ship instituted a charity fund out of his salvage fees which even now operates as a benevolent fund. In 1854, "Homidy" an Arab ship from Bombay to Mauritius, was wrecked on the Byramgore reef. In 1858, "Alchemist", bound from England to Bombay, and "Sultan" bound for Bombay, both wrecked on the same reef. In 1865, "Lord Brougham" was wrecked on Cherbaniani and "Abel Tasman", a Dutch ship on Byramgore. Most of the wrecks occurred at the end of the fair season in the beginning of the south-west monsoon.

No wrecks have been recorded on these reefs since 1865 which synchronises with the opening of the Suez Canal and the consequent change in the international trade route.

These banks are now regularly visited by fishermen from Chetlat Island who halt there up to one month. The area around abounds in sharks.

Peremul Par lying south of Bitra and 17 miles north-west of Agatti is a reef enclosing a lagoon. During high tide with a smooth sea, the reef is dangerous as they are hardly visible. Tradition has it that the reef got its name when the sailing craft pursuing the Perumal King of the West Coast wrecked on it. It was reported in 1894 that there was a tiny sand cay 4 feet high near the north-eastern extreme of the reef. Within the lagoon the coral reefs dry at low tide.





# CHETLAT

Latitude :—N. 11°—41'

Longitude :—E. 72°—41'

Area:—255 Acres (103.19 Hectares)

Population :—953 (1961 Census.)

Chetlat is the northernmost inhabited Island of the group. The shoal on which this Island stands is extensive and the lagoon is large and very perfect and the shores well protected. Along the eastern side of the Island is a wide belt of coral debris evidently the result of some severe storm. This belt broadens out at the south till it covers the whole southern end of the Island. The lagoon has only one entrance, and a sailing vessel loaded with cargo can enter only at spring tide.

The Island seems to have suffered greatly at the hands of the Portuguese pirates during the 16th Century. Shiek Zeinuddin in his book "Tohfut-ul-Mujahiddin", records that before their descent on Amini the Portuguese visited Shatelakum or Chetlat. A major part of the inhabitants were put to death and many were taken prisoners. In 1787, Chetlat joined the rest of the Aminidivis and defected from allegiance to the Rajas of Cannanore.

Sir Robinson (1869) reported that Chetlat is naturally the least promising of the Islands. The soil is very poor, the trees very slow of growth and not productive. Low mounds of sand occupy a great part of the centre. A scanty plant locally known as *Teerny* grows here. At the root of this plant a small ball about the size of a pea grows. After the plant has withered these are gathered from among the loose sand and eaten by the Islanders. The inhabitants are all poor, but quiet and well-behaved and devote most of their time to fishing, as the returns from plantation are not sufficiently large to induce them to take much pains over it.

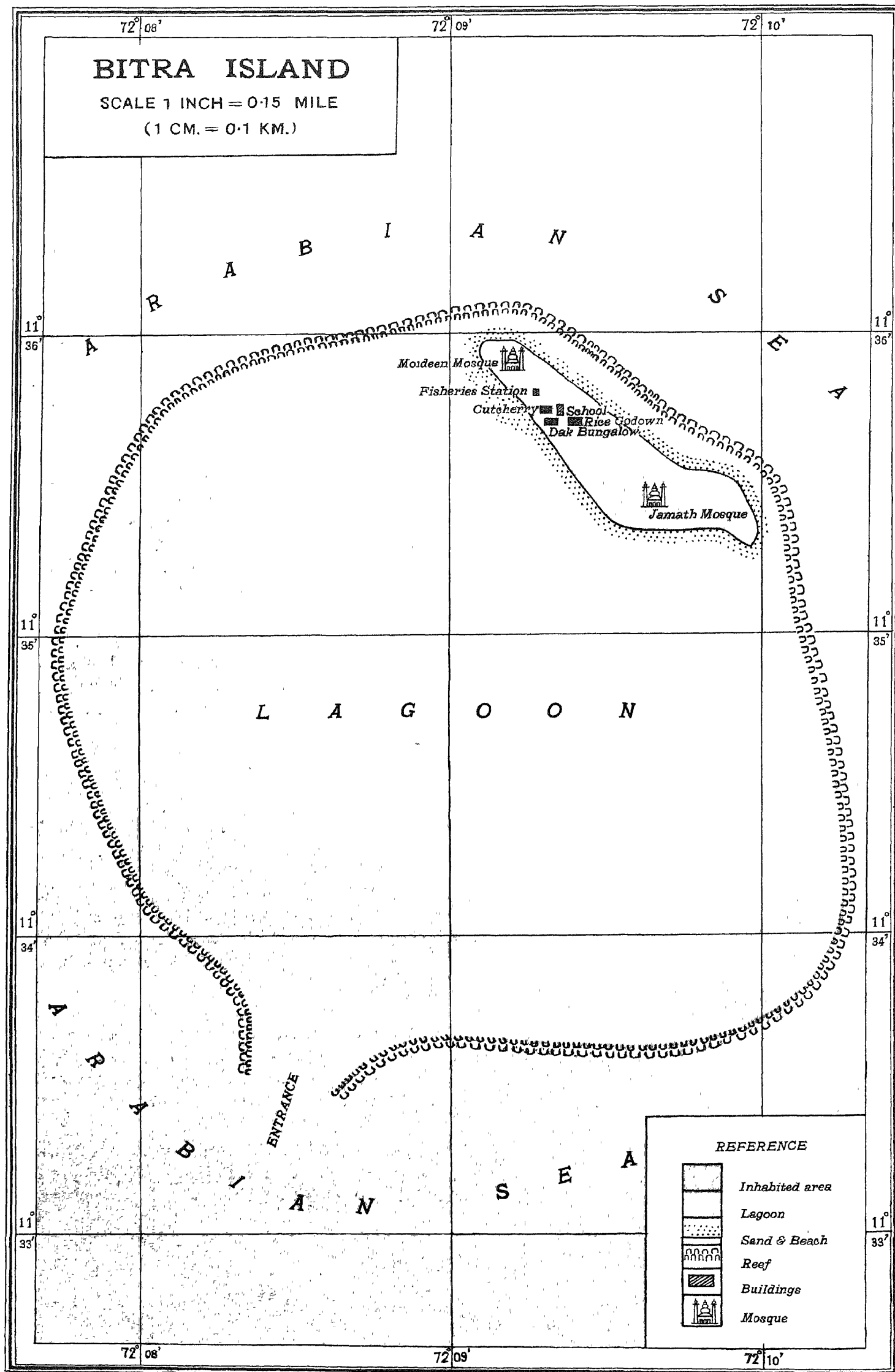
Bradley reported in 1881 that the condition of the island had considerably improved since Robinson's visit. It was much more fully planted than at that time and produced more betel than any of the other islands. It has the reputation of producing the best coir. A peculiar Cottage Industry of Chetlat is mat-making from tender coconut leaves. A few hundred mats are yearly exported and prized on the coast, their texture being fine. The sails of smaller boats are of these fine mats. The Island is also known for the neatly plaited cadjan leaves which is exported, in large quantities to the mainland. The result is that no rubbish or debris is found lying about. Mr. Ellis reported that the Island is a model of neatness. The people are the thriftiest and most hard-working and every fallen nut and every fallen leaf is utilized for some purpose.

Chetlat is an important Island from its situation as being the one to which vessels from Mangalore usually sail direct. The people are reckless navigators and have been losing their way occasionally and drifting in the sea. Inhabitants of this Island generally serve in Arab vessels as sarangs. They are good boat-builders also. Chetlat used to make the sailing crafts needed for other Islands. In the matter of fishing also Chetlat Islanders lead the rest except Minicoy.

In 1962, Chetlat had no modern buildings. By 1963, a Dak Bungalow, one Senior Basic School, a Co-operative Stores and a Community Centre were constructed. Chetlat has a Senior Basic School with 149 students and a Girls' Primary School with 45 students. A wireless station, a dispensary with a medical officer and a co-operative society with 324 members have been established recently.

The people of Chetlat are the poorest among all the Islanders. For many months they have to migrate to other Islands in search of work and most of them proceed to the Mainland also in search of employment. With the Public Works Department works on the Island they are able to earn their living and since 1962 no migration has taken place. With the formation of the co-operative society, they have been able to get their rice and other consumer goods during the monsoon at control rates. This has helped them economically.





# BITRA

Latitude :—N. 11°—35'. 30'' }  
Longitude :—E. 72°—09'—30''. }

{ Area :— 26 Acres (10.52 Hectares.)  
{ Population :—80 (1961 Census.)

Bitra is the smallest of the inhabited Islands with the largest lagoon in the whole of the Laccadive Islands. Once entirely covered by thick brushwood and shrubs, the Island was the breeding ground for flocks of sea birds. Disturbed by human intruders, the birds gradually evacuated the place. When Sir Robinson visited the Islands in 1848 he heard the people say that the birds had left Bitra almost a decade ago. There are no records to show the type of birds which sought sanctuary in this Island. Most probably they belonged to the same species of the Tern group which is found on the Pitti sandbank even now. People from the neighbouring Islands regularly visited this islet to collect the eggs of these birds and sometimes were able to gather 30 to 50,000 eggs a day.

During the fishing season the extensive shoals of Bitra provided a rich supply of a variety of marine fauna. People from Chetlat came to fish there and sometimes stayed as long as one month or till their stock of water was exhausted. The sea around abounds in sharks, and Bitra supplies most of the shark fins that were annually exported from these Islands. Tortoise was taken while laying its eggs on this lonely Island. Holothuria or sea slug was another marine fauna which was available in plenty. During the fishing season a good many Islanders were employed by coastal merchants in the manufacture of coke from this seaworm. Found on all coral formations which rise near the surface it was collected from this Island in great quantities and half boiled in water. It was then laid out and dried in the sun, and in this state had a good demand for the Chinese market in Bombay.

In the middle of the Island is the tomb of a sacred saint with about 200 trees planted round it as offerings in his name. The fruits of these trees were used by the fishermen when they landed there. An Inspection Officer in 1865 reported that the tomb was frequently repaired by people visiting the Islands. Pilgrims from other Islands occasionally visit Bitra.

In 1869, when an Amini Islander requested the grant of the Island on lease it was opposed by the fishermen of Chetlat and Kiltan who claimed that the trees were planted by them. Such a lease would take away the privilege enjoyed by these fishermen and the pilgrims in regard to the fruits of these trees. Another serious objection raised against the lease was that it would provide the lessees with a base for pillaging the ship wrecks that were very frequent on the adjacent reefs of Cherbaniani and Byramgore. The Island was however subsequently leased out and fetched at the first instance Rs. 11 as rent.

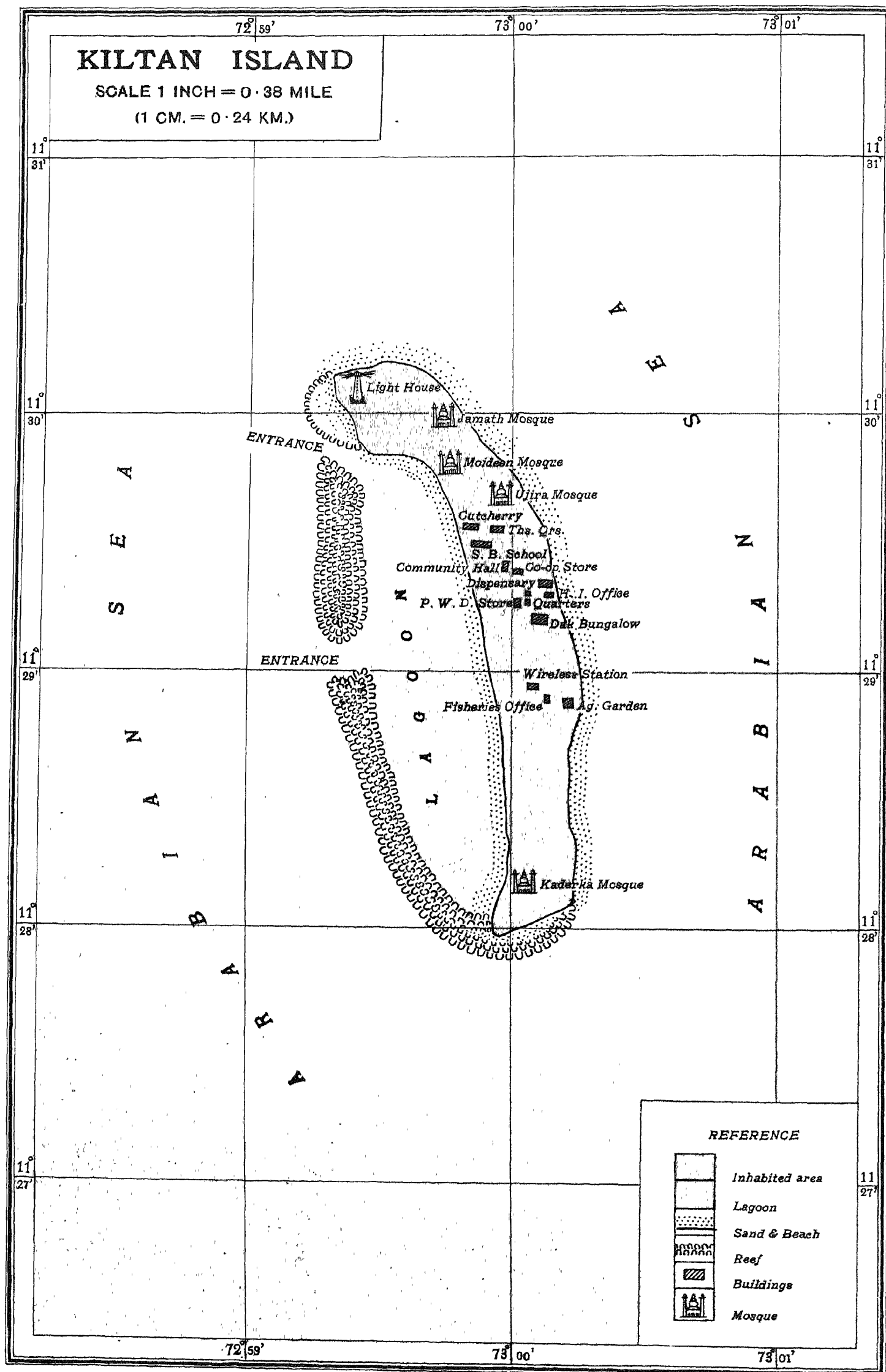
The lease created problems. There were difficulties in the way of allowing free fishing rights to the Islanders in these waters as the trees would most likely be plundered. In order to protect the renters, fishing passes were introduced. The system however proved ineffectual and the renters suffered.

In 1908 Mr. Ellis drew up a scheme to settle two families from Chetlat upon this Island. Fifty trees were assigned to each, but the experiment failed. The major objection was the difficulty in obtaining good water during the monsoon. The water turns brackish due to percolation of salt water from the sea.

After 1913, Bitra was visited only in 1931. In 1933 the steamer carrying the Inspecting Officer hooted and whistled for hours and finding that no boat turned up to pick the party, abandoned the visit. Bitra has no safe anchorage and during its brief stay the ship usually drifts around the Island.

By 1935 the floating population of Bitra had increased considerably and people had accustomed themselves to more prolonged fishing expeditions on this Island. In 1948 there were ten houses in Bitra and a floating population of 50, most of whom were from Chetlat. The resident population as per 1961 census is 80.

Today about twenty families in Bitra eke out a livelihood tending the coconut trees and fishing in the lagoon. Their fishing methods are still outmoded, but the mechanised pablo boats of the Fisheries Department occasionally visit them. The smell of dry fish is everywhere, and in the solitude of the Island, the lone beating of coir breaks the monotony. Bitra now has a single teacher school under the coconut grove with twenty-seven children and a modern Dak Bungalow overlooking the white sands of the turquoise lagoon. They have established a branch of the Co-operative stores of Chetlat and constructed a godown to store rice and other commodities.



# KILTAN

Latitude :—N. 11°—29'.

Longitude :—E. 73°—00'.

Area :—397 Acres (160.66 Hectares).

Population :—1,520 (1961 Census).

Kiltan is situated about 30 miles north-east of Ameni. The Island is about two miles long and 650 yards wide at the broadest point. The lagoon is about the same length and 950 yards wide. There is a high storm beach of coral at both the northern and southern ends of the Island. It continues for some distance along the eastern shore, till it disappears near the centre. The northern storm beach was evidently caused by some heavy storm from the north.

The lagoon is large but shallow and is rapidly filling up. Sir Robinson reported in 1846 that during the last 50 years many feet of land have been gained towards the lagoon. In 1869 it was again reported that the land continues to advance towards the western reef. A fresh row of coconut trees was planted every three or four years. It was a curious sight from the lagoon, the newly-planted trees rising in tiers from the seashore. The large boat houses in which the sailing vessels are kept were brought nearer the sea every two or three years. The Kutcheri building which was once at the edge of the beach is now some fifty yards inland. Today the lagoon is still filling up and Island vessels laden with cargo have to wait till the high tide to enter the lagoon.

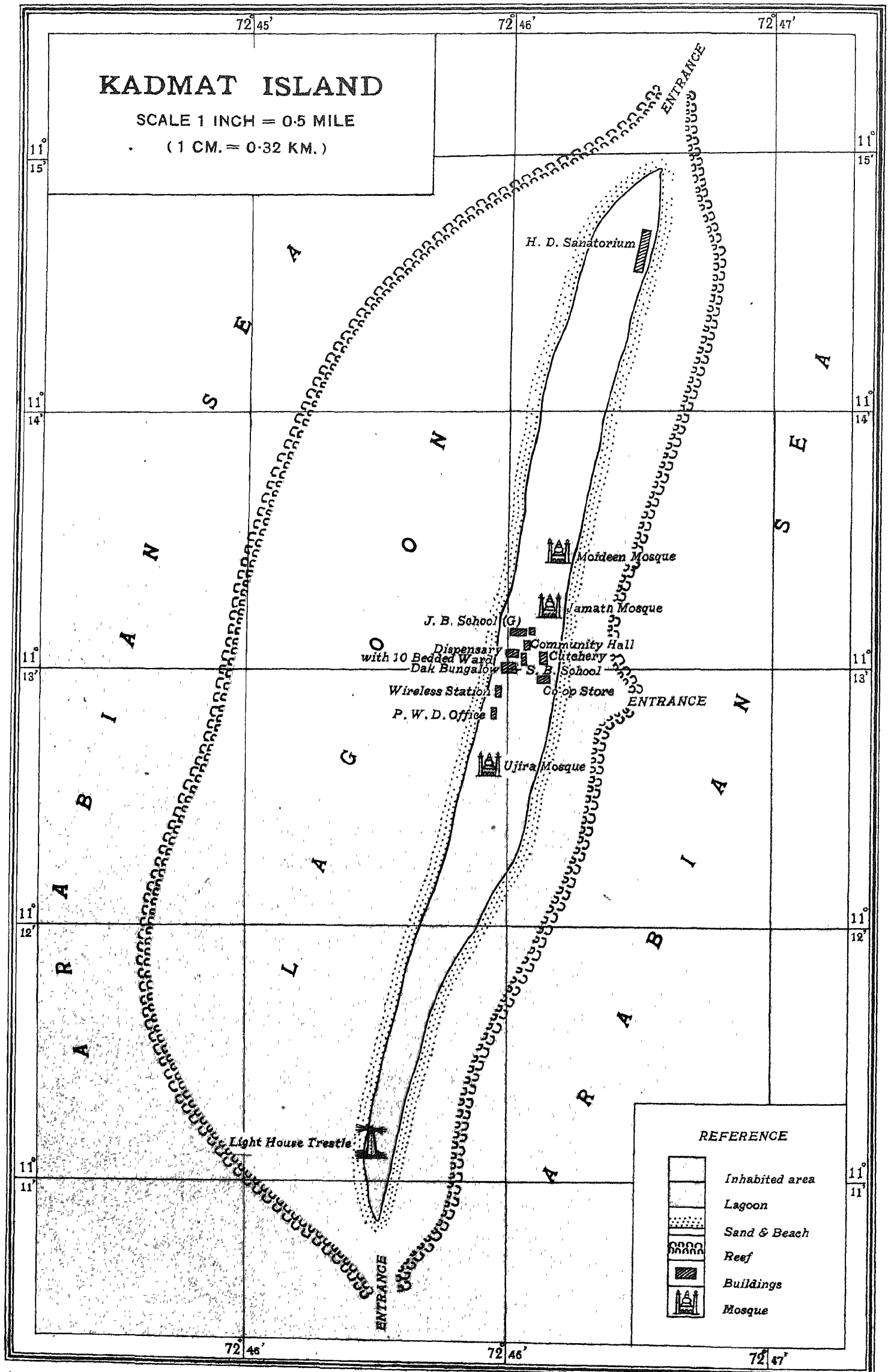
Sir Robinson described Kiltan as the most active and thriving Island of the group. When the ship Byramgore was lost on Cheriyanani reef, a large quantity of the treasure found its way into this Island. This gave an impetus to the plantation activity on this Island. The soil under coconut plantation is remarkably productive. In other Islands it is necessary to rear plants for one year with care and then transplant them, but in this a nut buried with a knife will grow, requires no attention, and comes into bearing early. The trees are planted up to the water's edge on every side.

The people of Kiltan have a rich tradition of folk dancing. The Kolkali players of this Island are vigorous, revealing an innate energy and vitality. The Kolkali or the stick dance and paricha kali or the sword and shield dance take many variations. The leader sings as they go round the circle making intricate steps in unison. The dances are carried on till the early hours of the morning. The dancers are invited to wedding ceremonies and are an important part of all festivities. Today these ancient folk dances are being revived and there is a dance teacher in the schools in every Island.

Kiltan lies on the international trade route. Ships plying between Colombo and Aden pass along this Island. A lighthouse was constructed in 1960 on the northern storm beach of this Island. Previously kerosene lights were erected here for the benefit of passing ships. In 1960 an American oil tanker the "National Peace" went aground on the northern extremity of this Island. The ship was later removed and salvaged.

Kiltan along with Chetlat was one of the most backward Islands of the group. The people lived mainly on handspun coir which they bartered to the Government for rice. At the time of Independence the Island had only an incomplete Primary School. The Medical Officer at Amini visited this Island once in a year. Even after Independence things did not change fast.

In 1958 a Dispensary was opened at Kiltan with a Medical Officer. The Primary School has been raised into a Senior Basic School, with about 300 students where free midday meals are provided to all children. In 1962 a Co-operative Society was formed on this Island. It has now a membership of 250 and a total share capital of about Rs. 37,000. A wireless station was opened in Kiltan in 1963.



# KADMAT

Latitude :—N. 11°—13'.  
Longitude :—E. 72°—46'.

{ Area :—748 Acres (302·70 Hectares).  
Population :—1851 (1961 Census).

In 1948 a little girl playing on sand near a sand stone quarry in Kadmat unwittingly laid her hands on a gold coin. That coin and many others discovered subsequently around the place, were later identified as belonging to the Roman Emperors of the 1st and 2nd century A.D. The revelation was curious. It could be the prized possession of some stranded mariner who found it useless on this island or it could be the hard earned fortune of some Islander who probably wanted to conceal it from the dreaded sea pirates. But it is strange that this should have occurred at Kadmat which was perhaps the last major Island of the group to be colonised.

When Lt. Bentley visited Kadmat in 1795 he found it uninhabited. Fifty years later Sir Robinson found inhabitants on this Island, but the people were very poor, shy and spiritless. He reported that the Island was once in a more flourishing state, but a sudden epidemic spread and thinned their numbers. The sites of several ruined houses were pointed out in testimony. Coconut cultivation was in a poor state and was confined to a strip across the middle of the Island. The remaining portions of the Island provided a picture of the original state of these Islands before planting was first started. "Except where planting has been effected (the land) is covered with brushwood, chiefly consisting of a shrub termed 'Kanni' by the natives, and so closely interwoven as to defy all attempts to penetrate except by cutting a pass. So rapid is the growth of this brushwood that parts of the Island which tradition says were formerly cleared for cultivation are now so completely overgrown again as to be inaccessible. The brushwood jungle is varied with open spaces covered with rank grass, attaining sometimes a height of six feet."

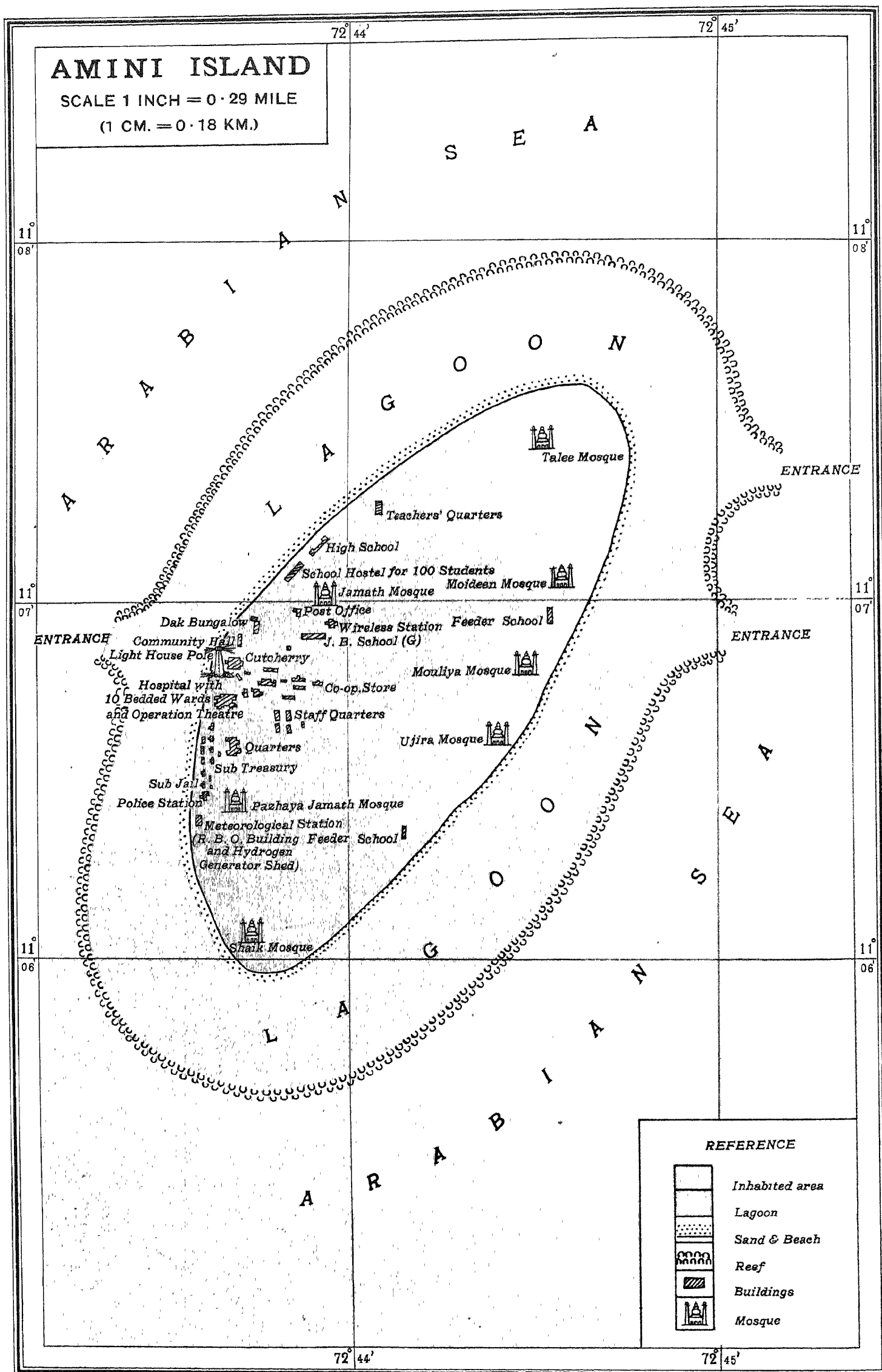
There is no gardenland (Thottam) on this Island, but the cultivation of dry grains like Ragi Jowar and Loba was extensive. People from Amini Island used to come to this Island during the monsoon for cultivation. The Amini people exercised a kind of suzerainty over this Island and in fact claimed that it was their property. Kadmat people were not allowed to build coast-going boats of their own, and their entire produce was required to be shipped in Amini odams.

Kadmat is long and narrow. It is only six hundred yards wide at the broadest point. For the most part where the coconut plantation is not thick enough or has grown very high, one can see through this Island. The eastern arc of the reef is exposed at low tide and forms a level platform stretching from the sea beach for about hundred yards. A high ridge of sand runs down the western side of the Island.

Along the middle of the Island is a solid lime substratum and limestones are cut for building purposes. Kadmat now supplies the entire stones required by the Public Works Department for the numerous buildings coming up in all the Islands.

In 1947 Kadmat had no facilities worth mentioning. Being close to Amini, Kadmat's claims were overlooked. It had no dispensary of its own, and the school was in a sorry state. Though Amini is close by and within sight, it is not possible to have communications during the monsoon period as the lagoon entrance is treacherous and the channel in between is not navigable.

In 1958 a Maternity Centre was opened on this Island. This was raised into a Primary Health Centre in 1962 under the charge of a Medical Officer. There is also a sanatorium for patients suffering from Hansens disease on this Island, which was originally started by the people themselves, but later taken over by the Government. The Sanatorium has a vegetable garden which is the pride of this Island. The Senior Basic School in this Island is now housed in a pucca building. Kadmat has a Junior Basic School for girls and a Feeder School. About 425 children are attending schools in the Island. Kadmat has a Co-operative Society with 274 members and a share capital of Rs. 14,000. A wireless station has also been started in 1963.





# AMINI

Latitude :—N. 11°—07'.  
Longitude :—E. 72°—44'.

Area :—622 Acres (251.71 Hectares).  
Population :—3,531 (1961 Census).

Amini was one of the first Islands to be peopled. Vasco Da Gama on his second voyage round the Cape is said to have visited this Island, and noted the superior variety of coir it produced. In a thwarted deal to secure the safe passage of the Island vessels from the onslaught of the pirates, the Portuguese emperor demanded 1,000 candies of Amini Coir every year. This was in 1530. Having failed to secure this trade by peaceful means the Portuguese would seem to have established their authority on the entire Amindivi group of Islands by force. Sheik Zienuddin records that the Portuguese slew a vast number of its inhabitants, and made captives of more than four hundred souls, men and women. They plundered also everything of value that it contained and burnt the greater part of the mosques and houses that were on this Island.

Tradition has it that the Portuguese were exterminated from Amini with the connivance of the messenger of the Sultan Ali Raja who poisoned them with snake poison at a grand feast in 1545. Subsequently the Islanders offered their allegiance to the Cannanore Rajas. The benevolent rulers who extended a helping hand in the hour of danger soon turned oppressive. The entire trade of the Islands became state monopolies. The exactions of the Raja's agents became unbearable. In 1784 the Amindivis offered their allegiance to Tippu Sultan and in 1799 with the fall of Tippu the Islands passed under the British.

Amini which is about 2 miles long by over a mile wide, almost completely fills the interior of the ring reef and only a very small lagoon is left on the western side. The beach on all sides is free from any bank of coral debris. On the seashore opposite the Kutcherri is a raised stone platform with a flight of steps leading down to the beach, and mounted on the platform are two old cannon said to have been taken from "Mahomed", a pilgrim ship wrecked at Amini in 1594. It is said that the Portuguese had a fort on this Island, all traces of which have now vanished.

Amini has always been and is even today the most densely populated Island of the group. Sir Robinson, who visited this Island in 1846 describes the Tottam or the Garden as follows :

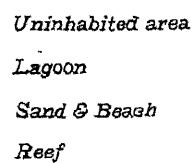
"In the middle of the Island over about 50 acres, the crust of coral has been removed and the whole centre of the Island presents a fine low damp soil probably hardly above the level of the sea. The whole bears marks of a well laid and ably executed design, on which an enormous amount of labour must have been expended, but tradition has preserved no account of the circumstance under which this vast and beneficial work was executed. All that is known is that it was completed while the inhabitants were still Hindus. The coconut trees planted in or about its edges are exceedingly fine, but it has been hitherto reserved chiefly for the cultivation of dry grains such as Loba, Jowa, Badag and Raghee, with some kind of vegetables, such as sweet potatoe and a kind of yam. Considerable number of plantain trees too are reared within it. It is by far the most profitable land in the Island and produces probably one-fifth of the food used there."

The garden corresponds to the oblong shape of the Island. It has now been completely planted up with coconuts. Today Amini imports all its food requirements from the mainland. The few traders who owned coast-going sailing craft marketed the Island products on the mainland and brought back rice and provisions. They enjoyed complete monopoly in this sphere. During the monsoon prices shot up, and the people suffered badly.

In 1954 Amini organised a Co-operative Society which was opened by the then President of the Indian Republic, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In 1962 this society was revived to take up the marketing of the entire Island produce and to provide the people consumer goods at a reasonable price. Now it has 475 members with a share capital of Rs. 20,000.

Today Amini has a High School and a Senior Basic School for girls. Children from the nearby Islands come to study at the High School. A hostel has been provided for them. There is also a Primary Health Centre on this Island in the charge of a Medical Officer.





# BANGARAM, TINNAKARA AND PARALI

Bangaram	Lat : N. 10°—55'—30"	Tinnakara ..	Lat : N. 10°—56'	Parali ..	Lat : N. 10°—56'—20"
	Long. E. 72°—16'—30"		Long : E. 72°—18'.		Long. E. 72°—18'—40"
	Area.. { 115 Acres.		Area.. { 77 Acres.		Area.. { 10 Acres.
	46.53 Hectares.		31.16 Hectares.		4.47 Hectares.

Bangaram, Tinnakara and Parali are actually sand banks in the middle of an extensive lagoon. Almost in the middle of the lagoon is Bangaram. To its east about one and a half miles away is Tinnakara and further east is Parali, diminutive and connected to the former by a sand bank 400 yards long and 30 yards wide during the dry season. The coral reefs close on Parali the eastern shores of which is the only portion that is open to the rigours of the high seas.

Originally in the hands of Agatti Islanders, these islets were confiscated by the Pandaram for the murder of an obnoxious agent of the Cannanore Raja stationed at Agatti. This was in 1764. At first the people were allowed fishing rights on payment of an annual rent of Rs. 400. Subsequently it became the Government's preserve and nobody visited the Island except with the Raja's agents for the purpose of plucking coconuts and collecting cowries.

Mr. Winterbotham visited the Island in 1878 and declared it unfit for habitation. "The jungle with which they are covered is almost impenetrable, and some of the screw pine must be over 30 feet high. I tasted the water in four or five holes. It was not only brackish but stank, so that I could hardly bring myself to wash in it." Winterbotham also speaks about the plague of rats and flies. "To eat a meal in the day time with any comfort is impossible. In a moment from all quarters assemble swarms of large blue bottle flies and settle on one's food and hands, and stick to every morsel till it is within one inch of one's mouth. They are so sluggish that it is easy to crush them with hand or knife, but when thus got rid of they leave behind them a putrid and disgusting smell. Many parts of the Islets are white with the skulls and bones of turtle caught for the sake of their blubber and left to rot and I suppose the flies breed on their carcases. Mosquitoes abound, but to a man who wears clothes are perhaps a minor nuisance. The trees are alive with rats."

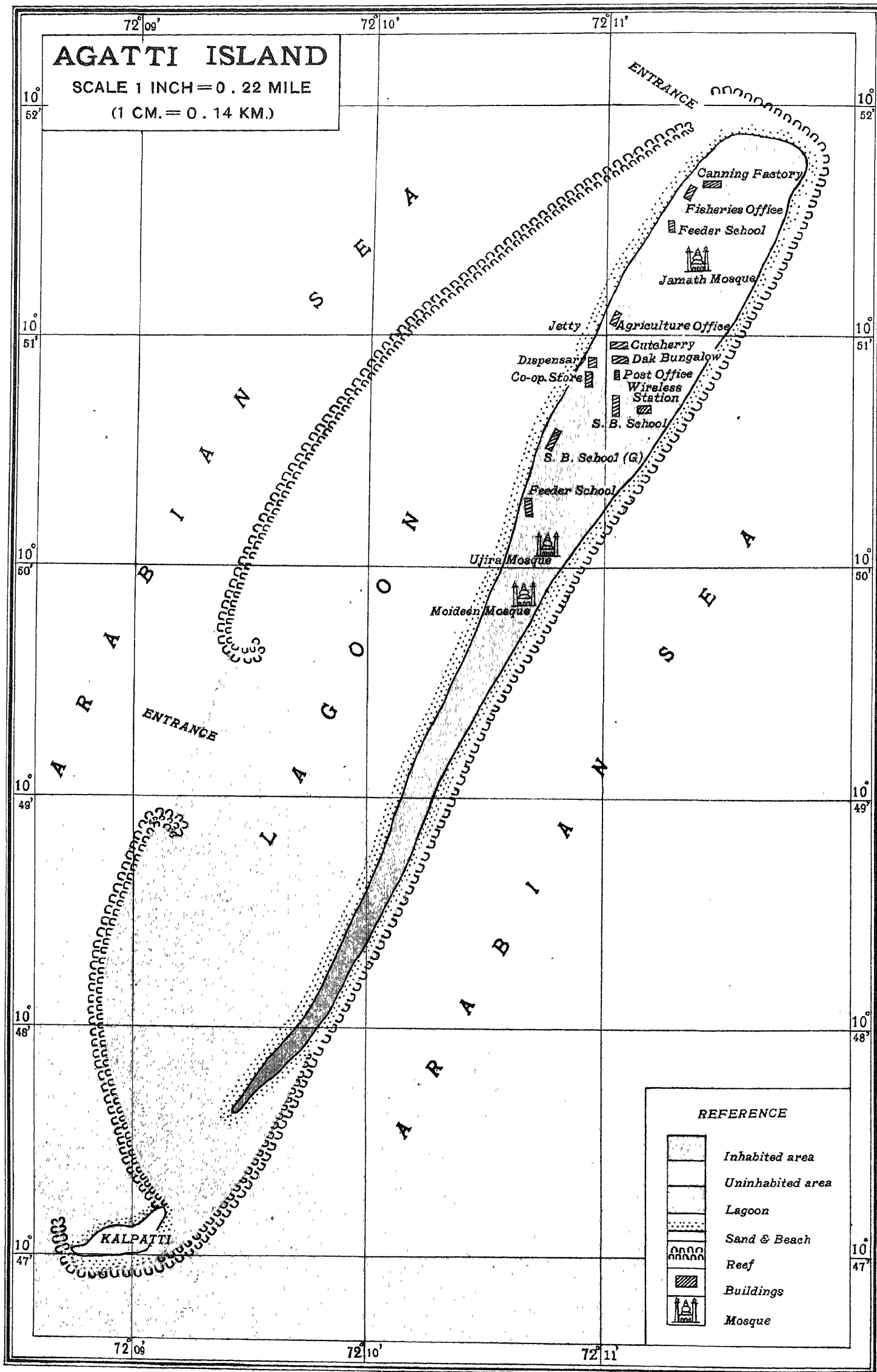
In 1881 "Mahabaleshwar" was lost off the Bangaram reef during the monsoon. The crew succeeded in escaping to Bangaram where they lived for about three months until some Agatti fishermen discovered them at the close of the monsoon.

Apart from Agatti Islanders, the inhabitants of Kavaratti and the Amindivi Islands frequently visited these Islets for fishing and also for obtaining cheruthalam wood which is used for securing the planks of Island odams. This wood is hard and heavy and it is also used for beating coir into fibre. Another flora that require special mention is Ittila that grows on Bangaram. From the root of this "a kind of Tapioca" is obtained, which is used as diet for invalids. Ittila grows on Minicoy also.

During the rule of the Rajas these islands were rented out for Rs. 1,000 per annum. Later the management was entrusted to the Amin of Agatti. In 1880 Mr. Brodie leased out the Islands for Rs. 1,220 securing the common rights of the fishermen visiting them to take as many nuts as necessary for food and drink provided they obtained a pass from the Amin. Only Agatti Islanders were however eligible for the pass. Later the Islets were granted on a twenty-year lease with the provision to plant 500 trees every year. The Islets are now rented out at regular intervals to the inhabitants of Agatti. The screw pine jungles have been cleared up and coconuts planted.

The lagoon surrounding these Islets is the favourite turtle hunting ground of the Agatti men. Two kinds of turtle are found—the green turtle and the Hawksbill. The green turtle is killed for its fat which yields a very valuable oil. It is caught in the night with nets when it comes into the shoal water to feed. The female turtle comes up at night to the sand above high water mark and lays eggs, from 100 to 200 in a neat little pile at one spot in a big excavation which she digs in the sand 15 to 20 feet long and 3 to 5 feet deep. The eggs have a white parchment-like shell and are the size and shape of a ping-pong ball. The young turtles all hatch out at much the same time and immediately make for the sea. Major Alcock ("Naturalist in Indian Seas") gives an interesting account of the hatch which he witnessed. "There was a tremendous commotion in the dry sand and out of it there emerged a swarm of little objects looking like beetles, which all with one consent made for the sea. Even when we caught them and started them off in the opposite direction some unerring instinct caused them at once to turn towards the sea again."

In the loneliness of these Isles the turtles still thrive but nowadays they are caught only when a stray one finds its way on the beach.



# AGATTI

Latitude—N. 10°—51'.

Longitude—E. 72°—11'.

}

{ Area—716 Acres. (289.75 Hectares.)  
Population—2,411 (1961 Census.)

Agatti is the most westerly of the Laccadive group of Islands. The reef forms an ellipse five miles in length and three miles broad. Along its eastern arc and lying slightly north-east and south-west is the Island itself, slightly over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and 1,000 yards wide at its broadest point. The southern portion consists of a long narrow stretch almost two miles long, and of an average breadth of about 100 yards. This portion is sparsely planted. The remainder of the Island is thickly planted with coconut interspersed with Bread fruit trees.

Agatti is remarkable in that it has no storm beach. The eastern shore is composed only of sand rising from the level of the reef flat, which is well exposed at low tide. To the south, separated from the main Island by a narrow channel is the small uninhabited Island of Kalpatti. This Island is fringed with dense undergrowth and contains coconut trees also. But the soil is not fertile and hence it is unprofitable to grow coconut trees.

Agatti possesses a singularly beautiful lagoon. In the translucent turquoise green water can be seen multicoloured fishes. The many gaps in the reef cause the ripples on the beach to be very strong for easy coir soaking. Husks are therefore put in fresh water pits, which provide a splendid abode for anopheles larvae. But the mosquito is a comparative stranger. The explanation offered by Maj. Alcock is that the pits are full of small species of fresh water carp which live upon the larvae.

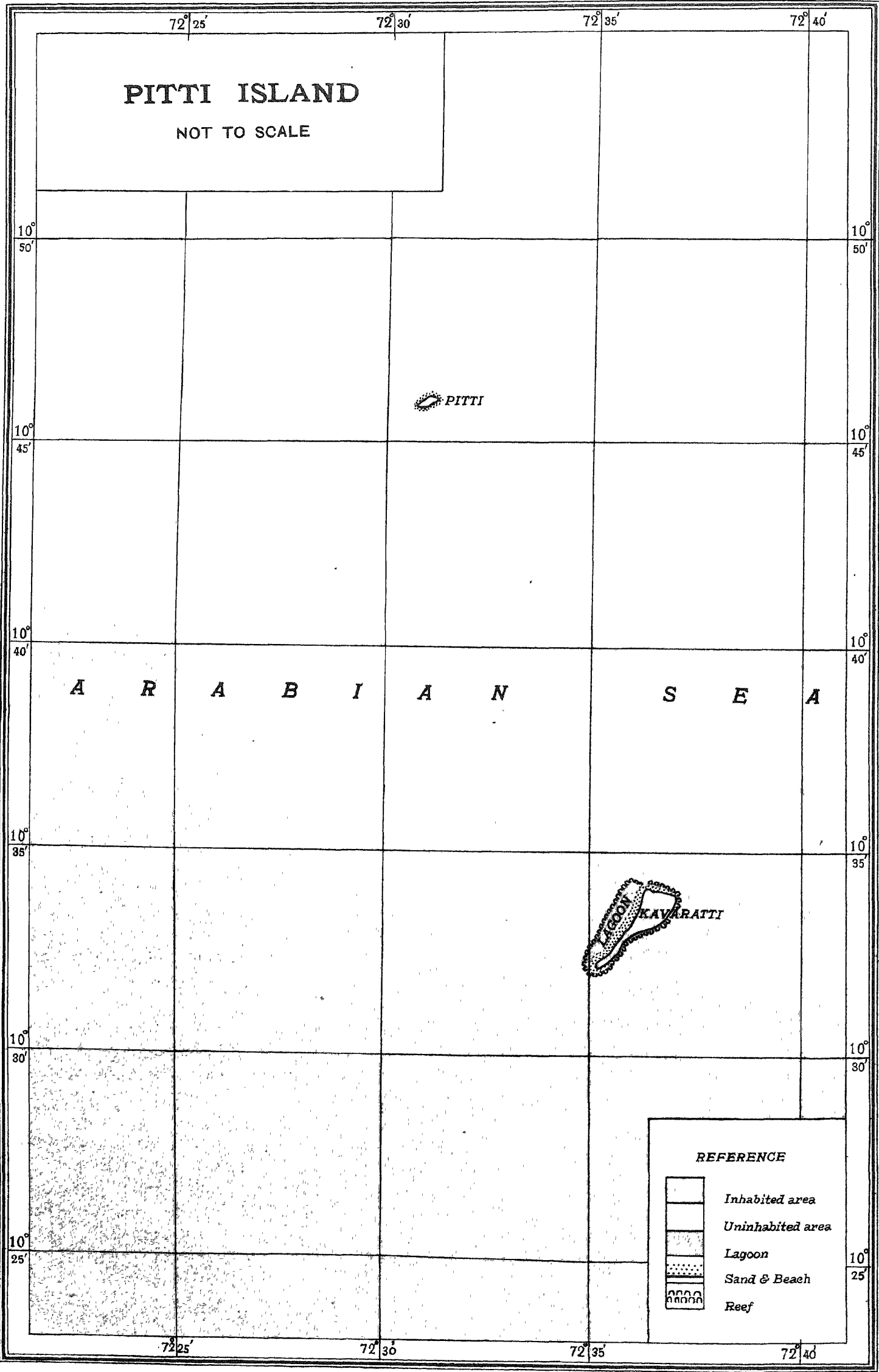
Broadly speaking Agatti is not blessed with a fertile soil. As far back as 1876 Winterbotham complained about its sterility. The yield from the tree has therefore been poor. An attempt was evidently made in the earlier times to construct a Thottam, for the cultivation of paddy and cereals, but the attempt was not successful. A sort of beans and sweet potatoes, plantains and a few betel vines were however grown in the garden.

While conditions have been rather unfavourable for agriculture the inhabitants of this Island had never hesitated to take to other professions. Fishing offered good prospects in the lagoon and in the adjacent reefs of Bangaram. For a long time there was a fish curing yard at Agatti but it did not succeed. Cod Liver Oil is also processed as a small scale industry here.

In 1876 Winterbotham reported that Agatti people found a strange means of livelihood on the mainland for their surplus population. From 100 to 200 men came to Calicut every year at the beginning of the fair season. "On Mondays and Fridays they visit Mohammedan houses and chant portions from the Koran and perform religious ceremonies. In their leisure they embroider topees of a fashion work by the Singalese. Before monsoon these people return to their Island with their savings."

At the time of independence, Agatti had only a tiny school housed in a thatched building. There were also no facilities for Medical aid. The Medical Officer stationed at Kavaratti visited this Island once a year. The underemployed population depended solely on coconut cultivation which was also not very productive.

In 1956 a dispensary was opened at Agatti which was subsequently raised into a Primary Health Centre. There is now a permanent Medical Officer stationed on this Island. In 1960 a Senior Basic School was started in Agatti. A separate Primary School for Girls was also opened. The latter has also been raised into a Senior Basic School. Apart from these, two Feeder Schools have also been opened in 1963. To provide subsidiary employment to the Islanders a Handloom Weaving Centre was organised in 1962. A small scale unit for tuna canning has also been opened here. Agatti already has a fish curing yard where Mas from Bonito is prepared as is done in Minicoy. In 1963 a wireless station has been opened on this Island. There is a Co-operative Store on this Island with nearly 400 members and a share capital of of Rs. 25,500.



# PITTI

Latitude :—N. 10°—46'—30".  
Longitude :—E. 72°—31'—30".

Area : { 3 acres.  
(1.21 Hectares.)

Major Alcock in his book "A Naturalist in the Indian Seas" gives the following description about Pitti Island. "From the ship it looked like a barren sand bank and nothing more, but as our landing party drew near, the boat suddenly became enveloped in a dense cloud of shrieking sea birds. On landing we found every foot of the ground above high water mark literally carpeted with young terns of two species, many living and nearly full fledged, many dead and rotting and many reduced to clean picked skeletons with only the quill feathers still sticking to the wing bones. There were no traces of nests or of any materials out of which nests could have been made, so that the parent birds must have laid and hatched their eggs on the bare sand. We soon discovered that the one great cause of the wholesale destruction of young birds was the voracity of the swarms of large hermit crabs (*Coenobita*), for again and again we found recently killed birds, in all the beauty of their first speckled plumage, being torn to pieces by a writhing pack of these ghastly crustaceans."

Pitti lies fifteen miles north west of Kavaratti. It consists of reef with a sand bank at its southern end. The Island does not contain even a blade of grass or any other vegetation. To attract the attention of mariners a pile of stones ten feet high was raised on this Island in 1880. Landing is very difficult as there are heavy breakers and the approach is rocky so that boats cannot go very near. In fact there is only one approach for boats on the northern side.

Two species of birds belonging to the tern group are found to migrate to this Island every year. Of these the Indian Sooty tern is completely brownish in colour, while the Philippine Noddy is white with a prominent dark patch on the forehead. Both the species are of the same size, about ten inches from beak to tail. They lay their eggs in thousands on the white sands. The eggs are of the size of normal chicken eggs with brown blotches on them. The breeding season is between January and March. The birds can be seen flying as far away as 10 to 15 miles, hovering over the water and eating small fish. Flocks of these birds can be seen chasing the Tuna shoals.

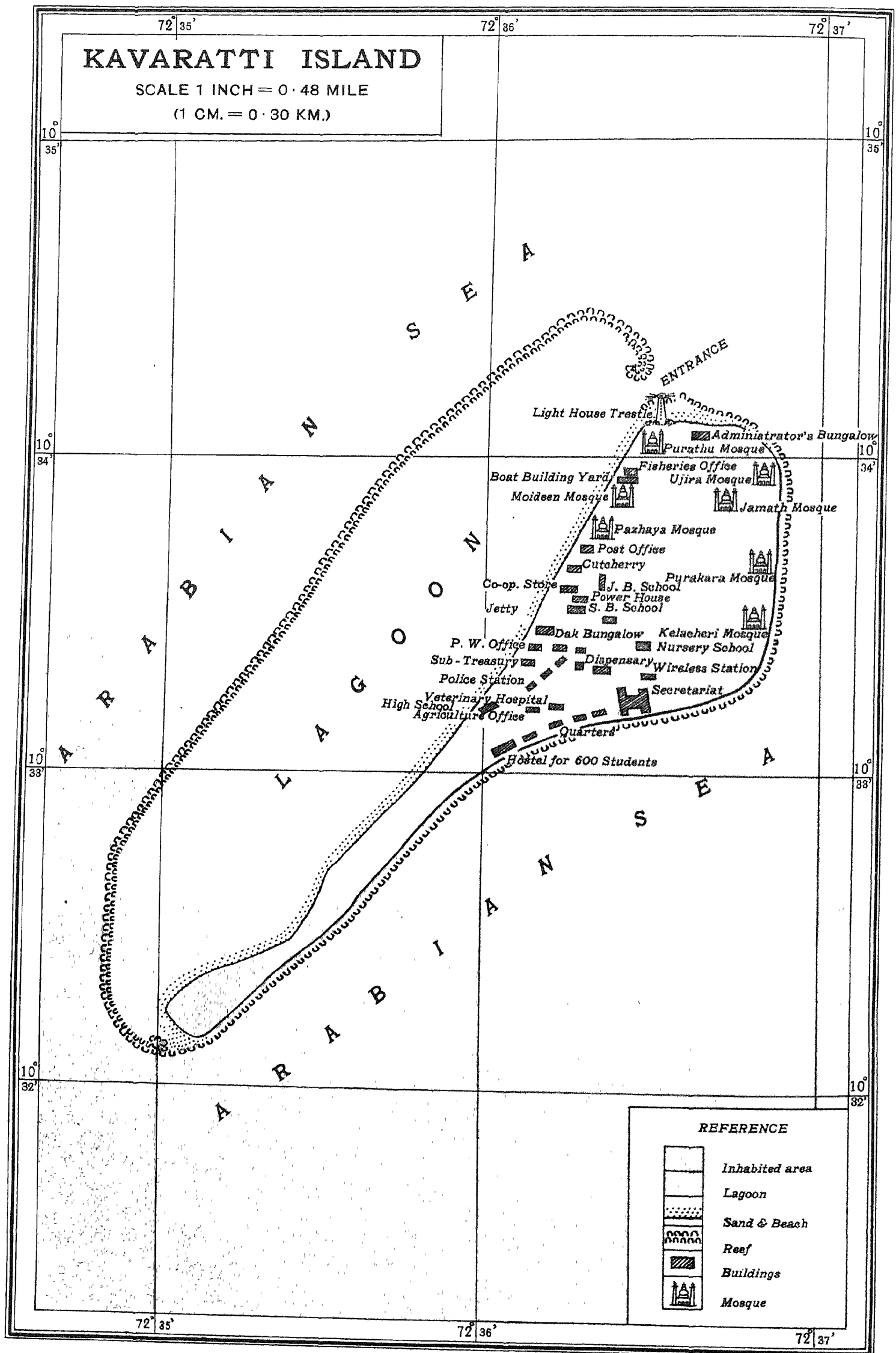
Sooty tern is generally found on the coasts of India and Burma, Andamans, Ceylon, Laccadives, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles. In the Laccadives, Hume found that many young were nearly fledged by February. On Pitti the birds begin to lay about Christmas.

The Noddies are oceanic birds, frequenting land only during the breeding season. For the remaining part they select rocky reef and small islands. Their flight is in appearance much slower and more lethargic than those of the terns. They wheel about more lazily, seldom, if ever, hover and then plunge after their fish prey, but settle on the sea, feeding on small surface mollusca, dead fish and floating oddments.

Many attempts were made to plant up Pitti Island. But somehow they have always failed. Ravage caused by crabs was one of the main reasons. Another reason was the intervention of human agencies who feared that it would rob them of the birds and the enormous quantity of eggs that they supply. People from Amini and Kavaratti regularly visited this bank to collect eggs, which were sometimes exchanged even for rice.

After the visit of Hume in the latter part of nineteenth century, the Island was Officially visited by the Administrator, Shri M. Ramunny in 1962. His report reads as follows: "Our party of three officers and six Islanders went from Kavaratti in a motor boat towing a small Island boat and when we reached near the Island it was not possible to take even that ten foot boat to the shore. Therefore the party had to swim the last two hundred yards to the Island. We found thousands of birds most of them sitting on their eggs. Apart from the little ones which did not move, the rest hovered around us almost like a cloud. The Islanders were busy collecting the eggs in a big copper vessel which they had carried with them while they swam ashore. We saw only two types of birds 'Sooties' and 'Terns'. We did not see any dead birds or carcasses. But there were plenty of crabs particularly Hermit crabs around the place. The way the Islanders were catching the birds to be taken back to the Island and the large number of eggs they collected made us decide that this should be stopped and the Island declared a Bird Sanctuary."

Pitti has now been declared as a Bird Sanctuary.



# KAVARATTI

Latitude :—N. 10°—33'-30".  
Longitude :—E. 72°—36'-30".

Area :—865.50 acres (350.25 Hectares.)  
Population :—2,828 (1961 Census.)

Of all the inhabited Islands, Kavaratti is the most diversified and picturesque. There is a small inland lake at the northern end near which Mr. Pinhey saw a large solitary snipe. At this end the lagoon is shallow and provides a beautiful pool for swimming. The southern part of the Island is a long and narrow strip only fifty yards wide. It would appear to have been a separate Island in olden days but is now connected. On the sea side at this point and extending round into the lagoon is a high storm beach composed of bits of coral and coral debris. The ridges marking each successive storm can be clearly traced. In the shadowless blue of the lagoon can be seen multicoloured corals forming an under water garden.

Kavaratti which lies between Androth and Agatti is perhaps the most centrally situated Island of the group. It is about three and a half miles in length and its greatest breadth is about three-fourths of a mile. The lagoon is about a mile wide. The main entrance at the north-west point of the Island is marked by a small pinnacle of rock about six feet high which seem to be a portion of the original reef left untouched by the sea. All coir is soaked in pits on the lagoon beach. There is a conspicuous development of beach sand stone along this beach.

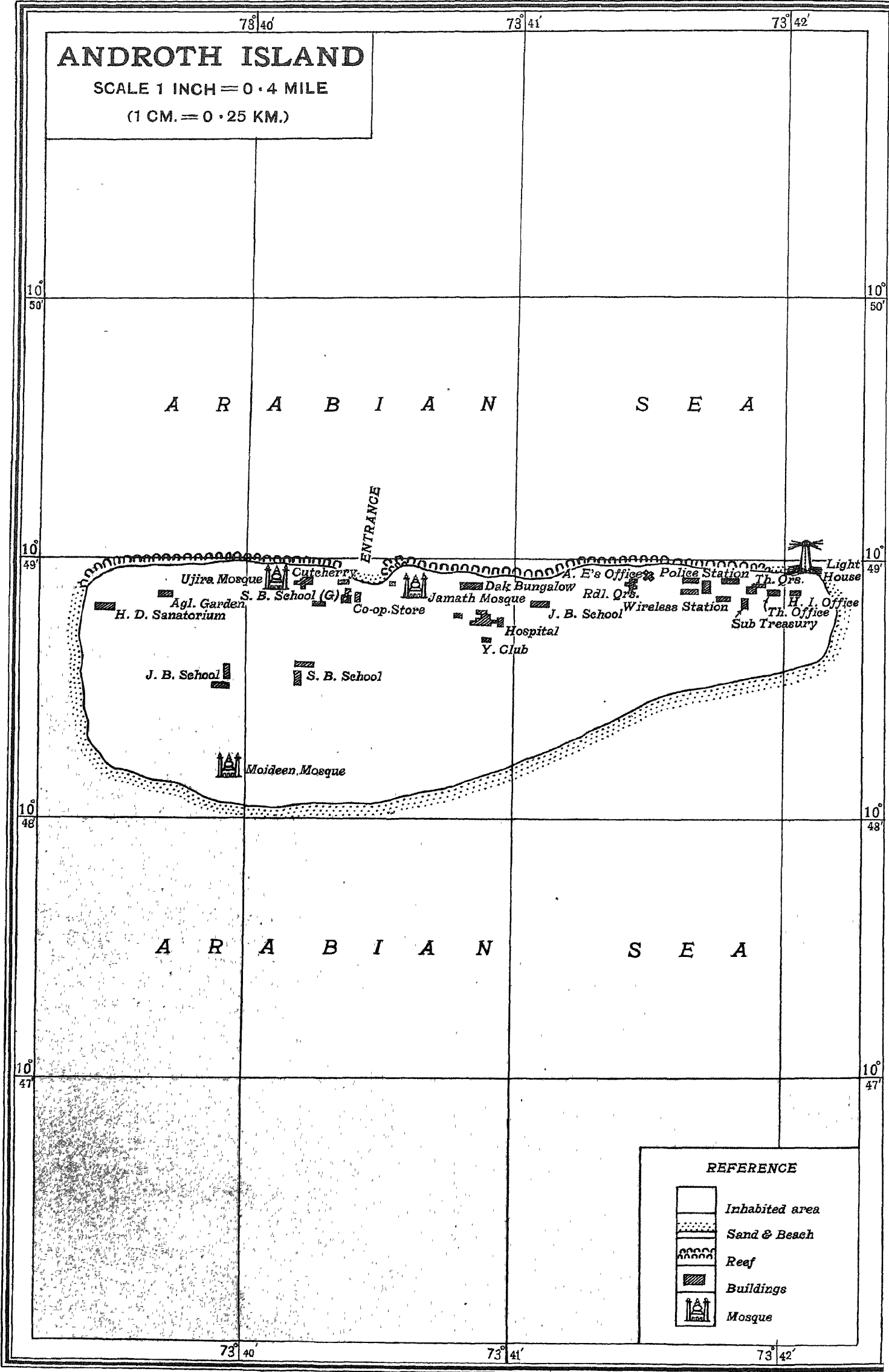
Remnants of a tottam can still be seen on this Island in the shape of a small valley in the centre. Dry grains used to be grown in this area in olden times. This has now been entirely covered by coconut plantation. In 1905 it was reported that enormous quantities of lime fruit were exported from this Island. Towards the south of the Island there is an abundance of lime trees, but as the fruit ripens in August-September when the supply of salt in the Island is very low, the profit which could be made by pickling them is altogether lost.

The people of Kavaratti have considerable skill as stone masons and wood carvers, and their mosques are architecturally superior to those found on other Islands. The Ujira mosque with its intricate carvings in wood is a fine example of the skill of the Kavaratti craftsmen. The patterns are most intricate and have been picked out in harmonious shades of pale green and dark red that are very effective. The Jamath mosque is a large building and possesses the largest tank of any mosque in the Islands. The headstones in the grave yards are stained a delicate green or blue with Arabesque designs, and Koranic texts are carved on them revealing the most delicate skill of carving on stone.

Kavaratti can lay claim to a number of modern buildings also. By virtue of its location Kavaratti has become the headquarters of the Administration. Consequently numerous Government buildings are coming up at the South of the Island. The Secretariat building is an imposing one. Other important buildings are the Treasury, the wireless station, the police station and the Dak Bungalow and the Administrator's House and the High School under construction. A godown for the Co-operative stores which was founded in 1962 has been opened recently.

Today Kavaratti has a High School and a Senior Basic School for girls. About six hundred students are attending these schools. There is a twenty bed hospital with a Medical Officer. The Co-operative Society has about 500 members with a share capital of Rs. 21,500. Kavaratti has a Poultry Farm, and a fish curing yard attached to the Fisheries Department. Mechanised Pablo boats are landing large quantities of fish now. There is also a Fisheries Workshop here. Electricity was introduced in this Island in 1963.





# ANDROTH

Latitude :—N. 10°—48'—30' }  
Longitude :—E. 73°—40' }

{ Area :—1,067 Acres (431·80 Hectares.)  
Population :—4183 (1961 Census.)

Androth witnessed the first success of Islam in these Islands. It is said that the Arab Teacher Ubaidullah having failed in his mission in Amini turned to Androth with his lone female convert and met with quick success. Tradition fixes the event to 41 Hijara corresponding to 664 A.D. though there is not sufficient material to support the theory. However, Androth has ever since been looked upon with sanctity. The Island contains the tomb of the Saint, and in 1846, Robinson reported that it was customary for all boats passing past this Island to repeat the “Fatiah” as a mark of respect to the great religious leader.

This religious leadership Androth retains even today. Androth is the headquarters of the Rifai sect of Islam and preachers from this Island go to the mainland, conduct prayers and give talismans to cure both bodily and mental diseases. They claim disciples from all over South India, Ceylon, Malaya and Burma. Some of them are said to be sound scholars in Islamic theology and Arabic Literature. There are about a hundred of them who go on “Zafar” to distant places and their combined income is estimated to be about Rs. two lakhs a year. The religiousness of the Island is also reflected in the comparatively greater seclusion of women, the observance of religious ceremonies and feasts to a greater extent than found elsewhere, the almost compulsory religious instruction of the children in the mosques and the strict adherence to the differences of class.

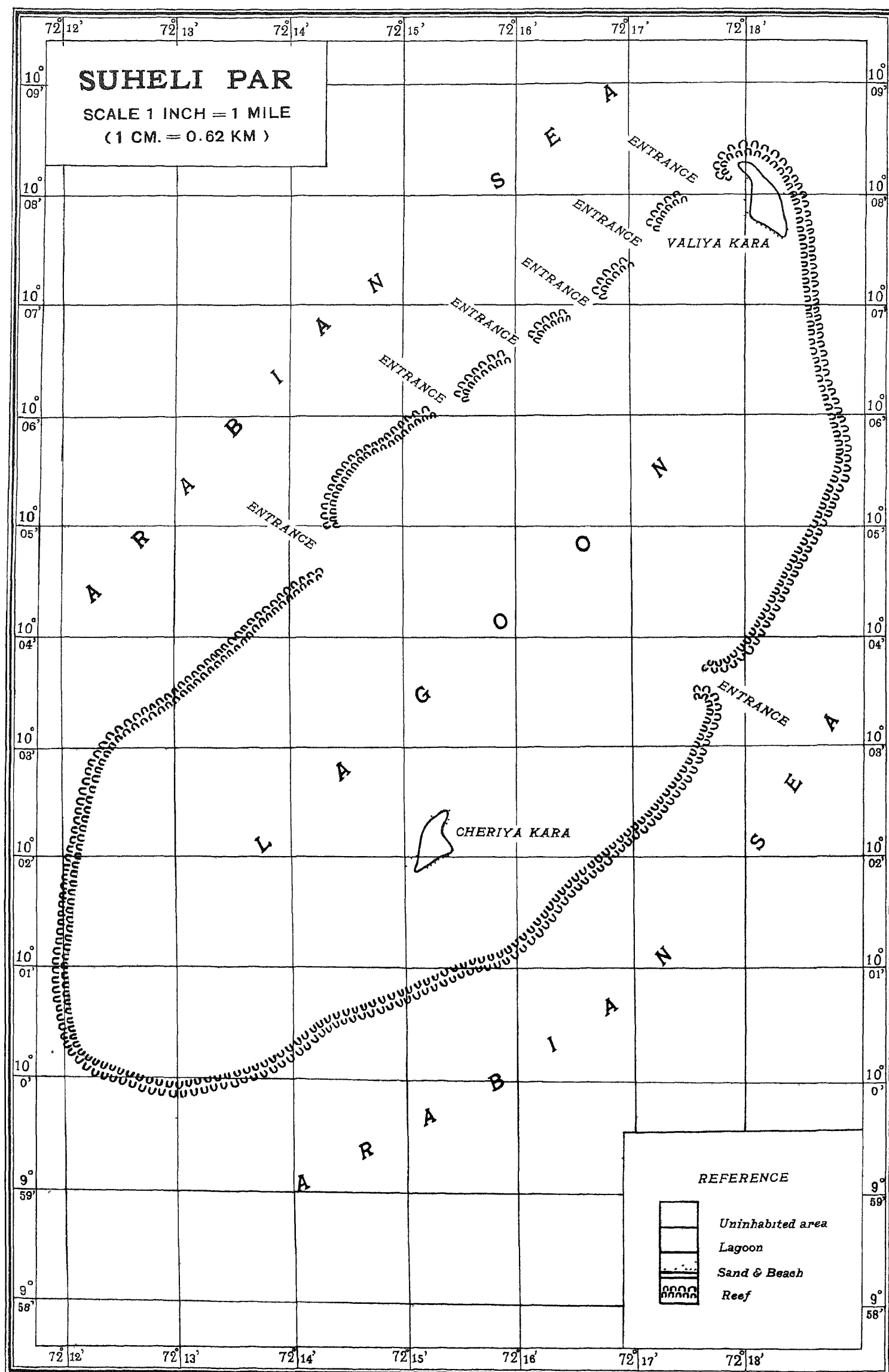
Sir Robinson who visited Androth in 1848 stated that before the gale of 1847 this Island was considered the most flourishing Island of the Beebee of Cannanore. Members of several of the chief families of this Island were employed by the rulers in the internal management of other Islands and consequently enjoyed exceptional influence. The great storm of 1847 left only 900 people on this Island; the population prior to this is estimated at 2576. A large number of survivors migrated to other Islands where they were eventually settled on Government lands.

Androth has no lagoon and the Island occupies the whole interior of the atoll. Round the whole Island except at the north-east extremity, the reef flat is exposed at low tide. On the northern side, there is a small boat harbour. Coral growth has been continuous in this harbour, and it was once successfully blasted in 1909. Round the harbour are built the big sheds for housing the sailing vessels. Launching and hauling of the boats is a community service in which every able-bodied Islander participates. Big feasts follow each launching and it is customary to offer prayers to the mosques on such occasions.

As there is no lagoon, fishing is generally poor on this Island. A favourite sport is catching “Appal” a small species of octopus, which when roasted is esteemed as a great delicacy. “Every moonless night from dark till 9 or 10 p.m. numbers of men and boys in groups of two or three were to be seen marching up and down the shallow water near the harbour, one holding a torch and the others on the look out. The fish is caught by the hand and as, the octopus clings to the fingers when seized instead of trying to escape, his capture is easy. When alarmed these fish emit a dark coloured fluid which discolours the water and under cover of which they hope to escape unobserved.”

Androth produces the best copra in the whole of the Laccadive Islands. The superior micro-variety is in great demand in Calicut and Mangalore for export to the Bombay market. But the real value of their produce never accrued to the Islanders as they were marketed through mainland middlemen. Now the Co-operative Society formed in 1962 is marketing their produce after proper grading. This has helped innumerable small producers in the Islands. The Co-operative Society has now about 800 members with a share capital of Rs. 25,000.

The Islanders have taken great strides in other spheres also since Independence. Today there are two Senior Basic Schools for boys and girls separately and two Feeder Schools in this Island. Their total strength comes to about 700. There is a Primary Health Centre with an inpatient ward. There is also a Hansens Disease Sanatorium in the Island. A new lighthouse is under construction.



# SUHELI PAR

Valiyakara { Latitude :—N. 10°—08'.  
Longitude : E 72°—18'—20".  
Area :—120 Acres (48·56 Hectares )

Cheriyakara { Latitude :—N. 10°—02'.  
Longitude :—E 72°—15'—20".  
Area :—81·75 Acres (33·08 Hectares )

Suheli Par consists of a barrier reef, enclosing a lagoon in which lie two uninhabited Islands known as Cheriyakara and Valiyakara. Both Islands are very low, perhaps little more than three feet above high water mark. Both appear to be very fertile but the sand stone substratum is absent and good water is therefore not available. Like Bangaram, etc., these Islets are sand banks formed in the middle of the lagoon.

Tradition has it that Suheli was originally held by Kavaratti Islanders, but was subsequently confiscated by the Rajas of Cannanore as a communal punishment for an alleged conspiracy against his representative there.

Perhaps the first attempt at colonizing Suheli was made by Sir W. Robinson in 1848. He founded a colony of 200 persons belonging to Kalpeni and Androth left destitute by the great storm of 1847. But as the Islands gradually recovered from the effects of the storm these people returned to their homes. Further attempts were made by Winterbotham in 1876.

In 1880 Brodie reported that the soil of Suheli appeared to be very fertile. They do not contain any screw pine at all like other Islands. In the centre of Valiyakara there are large trees of various kinds, the most common being a species of banyan (*Ficus Indicus*). At the eastern and western extremities the jungle becomes smaller and is composed of a species of *Rhododendron* locally known as *kanni*. On the north the shore is composed of coral rock, and the vegetation overhangs the water.

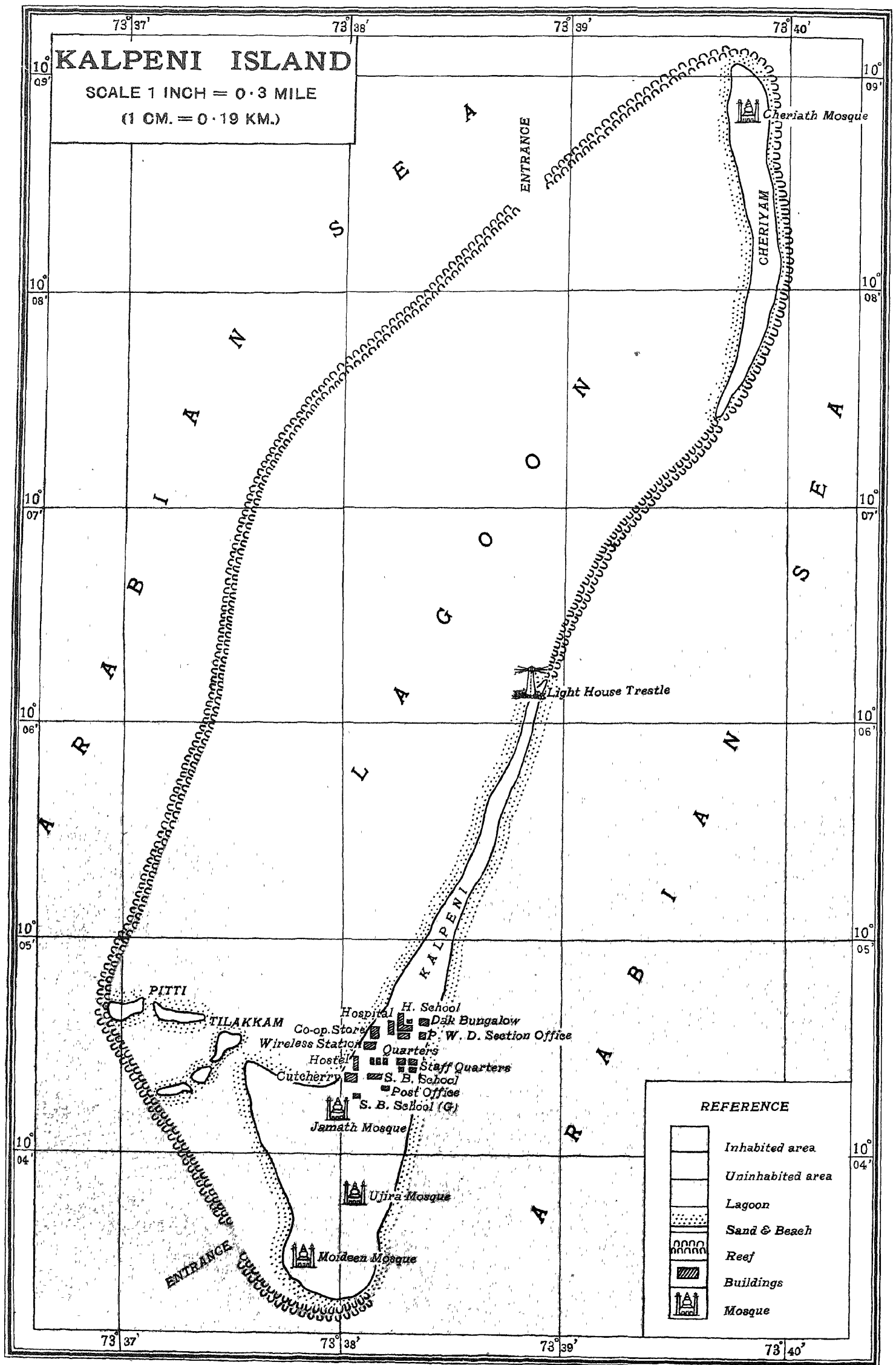
Cheriyakara on the other hand does not contain much vegetation. There is a good deal of shrub about 5 feet high, and the remaining part of the Island is covered by coarse long grass. Near the centre of the Island there is an extensive shallow pond and marsh of stagnant water surrounded by dense scrub jungle. The beach is generally sandy and the lagoon in the immediate neighbourhood is very shallow and large flats of sandy area are left dry during low tide.

In 1881 both the Islands were rented out to three Kavaratti Islanders for Rs. 350. Since then planting activity has been speeded up, and the Islands are now a thick mass of coconut trees. The Islands still remain uninhabited. After the monsoon all the rentiers go to this Island in a group to pluck the nuts. This custom prevents complaints about thefts against early visitors.

Suheli is frequently visited by Islanders from Kavaratti on account of the excellent fishing in the lagoon, and occasionally by people from Agatti and Amini for the same purpose. These fishing visits usually extend over a period of several weeks, during which time, the Islanders occupy temporary sheds. Today the mechanised boats of the Fisheries Department have made Suheli one of their regular fishing centres.

During the period of the cowrie shell monopoly Suheli was much coveted for the excellent cowrie fishery it provided. The cowries are gathered in a peculiar manner. Long coconut leaves are cut and put in the lagoon for many days together. The cowries gather around the leaves and hold on to them firmly. After some days the leaves are removed and the cowries collected. Turtles are also available in abundance in Suheli. They are caught for their oil.

A small godown for fish curing has been constructed on this Island now. The other buildings on this Island are a mosque of rude construction and the tomb of a Thangal much venerated by the Islanders. Many miracles are ascribed to him and it is customary to invoke his aid in storms or when delayed by adverse winds. Suheli, which lies on the international trade route will soon have a lighthouse on its southern shore.



# KALPENI

Latitude :—E. 10°—04'.  
Longitude :—E. 73°—38'.

Area :—649 Acres (262.64 Hectares.)  
Population :—2,613 (1961 Census.)

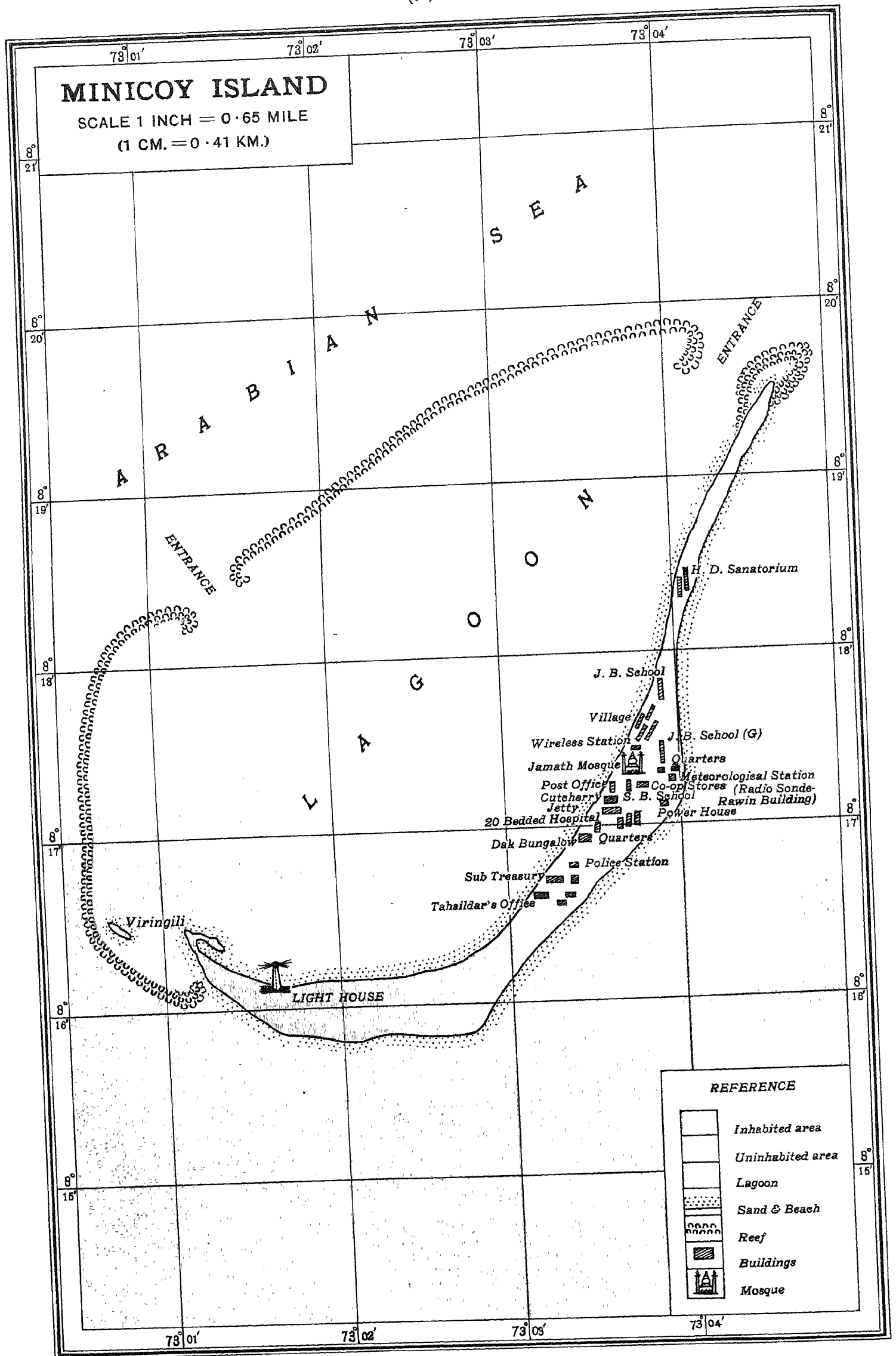
The great storm of 1847 convulsed and reshaped Kalpeni. “ The sea rose and flooded the whole Island, but across the narrow part of the main Island it seems to have had tremendous velocity. All the trees with the very soil, and between 50 and 60 houses were washed away into the ocean with upwards of 200 persons, while along the whole length of the shore a flood of loose coral has been deposited. . . . . The storm lasted for about an hour in all its violence. Then a sudden lull came and the wind soon sprang up briskly from the Westward and the flood subsided leaving the Island in the most perfect state of desolation. Of the 348 houses standing before the storm not one escaped. The population of Kalpeni prior to the hurricane is reckoned at 1642. Of these 246 were drowned or washed away during the storm, 112 perished in the ensuing five months from famine or from the diseases engendered by unwholesome and insufficient food. Three hundred and seventy-six escaped to the coast, leaving in the Island 908 of whom four-fifths are Women and Children ”

The storm separated Cheriam from the main Island of Kalpeni. A sea bank of coral stones was formed along the East and South-East shore. About 12 feet high and more than 60 feet in width at the base it now provides a natural barrier against the recurrence of such a disaster. At the South-East corner the waves break at the base and large boulders are hurled upwards, and when they roll down with the reflux the noise caused is tremendous. A similar phenomenon though on a smaller scale occurs at the North end of Cheriam. A reef is now forming between Cheriya and Kalpeni and in low water it is practically dry, and one can walk across from one Island to the other. Action of the sea has subsequently split the two Islands of Thilakam and Pitti on the South-West of the main Island. Today they consist of five Islands. All these tiny Islands together with Kalpeni are enclosed in the same lagoon which is very extensive.

The storm, and the consequent dislocation of life and property gave the unscrupulous agents of the absentee rulers a chance to confiscate most of the land for the Government. When Winterbotham visited the Island in 1876 he found three-fourths of the Island covered with a dense scrub jungle most of which was Pandaram (Government) property. The general practice was to lease out the Pandaram trees to the highest bidder at an auction conducted annually. As the tenants had no security of tenure they had no interest in improving the property and not a single tree was planted and not a yard of jungle cleared. When Mr. Winterbotham asked the people whether they would accept leases on condition that it will be cleared and planted up, the people replied that they already had sufficient employment.

For a population of 1029 in 1876 the tottam (garden) was in excellent order. “ Leaf manure is liberally applied, and plantains, betel, beans, sweet potatoes, raggy and millet thrive. I imagine the yield, together with bread-fruit and coconuts would be quite sufficient to keep the Islanders from actual famine for a year if their annual rice supply were cut off.” (Winterbotham). In the matter of its sea products also Kalpeni is peculiarly rich. The seer fish, skate, shark, appal or Bombay Duck, flying fish and sword fish are caught in abundance. The turtle, killed for its oil, but not for eating, is very common and the tortoise pretty frequent.

Strangely enough fishing is no longer a profitable industry in Kalpeni. The prosperity of the tottam is a thing of the past. In 1947 things were in a sorry state. The Islanders were living mainly on handspun coir and copra, which hardly gave them a subsistence income. The Island was facing a great public health problem. Filariasis was on the increase. Educationally also the people were backward and child marriages assumed an appalling rate. The Government launched an all out battle on poverty. In 1956 when the Union Territory was formed the ill equipped dispensary of this Island was provided with adequate medicines. A programme for the eradication of filariasis was launched, and it has been possible to control the further spread of the disease. Kalpeni has now a High School started in 1962 and also a Senior Basic School for girls. A co-operative society was organised in 1962 which has now about 450 members and a share capital of Rs. 26,000. To provide increased employment opportunities for the people a small Hosiery Unit is to be established on this Island. There is a wireless station and a Post Office on this Island.





# MINICOY

Latitude :—N. 8°—16'.

Longitude :—E. 73°—03'.

{ Area :—1,120 Acres—(453.25 Hectares.)  
Population :—4,138 (1961 Census).

Marco Polo in his 13th century travel diary speaks of a female Island in the Indian Ocean. This Island was inhabited entirely by women. The men come to this Island only during the months of March, April and May. The people are all baptised Christians but follow the ordinances of the Old Testament. They find on this Island very fine ambergris. They live on fish, milk and rice. They are capital fishermen, and catch a great quantity of fine large sea-fish, and then they dry, so that all the year they have plenty of food and also enough to sell to the traders who go there.

The remarkable comparison that these remarks bear to the actual state of affairs in the Island makes Logan conclude that the female Island referred to may have been Minicoy.

When Winterbotham visited this Island in 1876 he found that there were 1,179 women and only 351 men. The men were mostly the old and the infirm who could not pursue any work. There were also some fishermen. The other men were absent on their voyages. The people preserved certain strange customs which were practised before Christ. They isolated people suffering from communicable diseases. Community punishment in the form of public whipping was given to people committing adultery. The people were expert fishermen and the large quantity of fish landed was processed into a hard dry fish known as Mas.

Though Sir Robinson did not visit the Island he has left us a description of the Minicoy trade. “These active merchants and sailors carry on a considerable carrier trade from which their profits are good. Their boats which are superior to the Laccadive craft leave the Island about August each year, with their cargoes of coir, nuts, jaggery and dried fish, etc., and proceed to the Maldives and Ceylon where the dried fish is exchanged for other articles fitted for the Calcutta market. Further they proceed with coir, etc., and disposing of them, supply themselves with rice in the cheap markets of the Arraccan coast. They retain sufficient rice for home consumption and dispose of the rest in Ceylon and Maldives.”

In 1908 Mr. Ellis lamented that the quaintly rigged Minicoy vessels will soon be things of the past. In that year there were only two *odies* on the Bengal trade and of these one had just returned damaged having been able to proceed only as far as Galle. The Islanders had almost ceased to look across the seas for wealth and had started concentrating on mas fisheries.

Ellis describes the lure and excitement of mas fishing, and the deft hands that work miracles with the rods. The live-bait is caught in the lagoon and kept in two wells one just forward and the other just aft of the mast. “The rods used are six feet bamboos with a line of the same length and a barbless iron hook kept freshly silvered with lead, and the shank made broad flat and curved to resemble as far as possible a small fish. When the boat gets into the shoal every available hand seizes a rod. They crowd the platform overhanging the stern. The bailer hurls the live bait right and left among the fish. Two men on each side of the stern keep up a continuous splashing with a long wooden ladle, while the others dash their hooks among the shoal and as soon as they get a bite hand out the fish by the main force swing it on board and with a deft dip of the rod, all in one motion, unhook it and send it slithering between their legs down the platform into the well of the boat.”

The “Mas” annually fetch the Islanders about Rs. 5 lakhs on an average. But due to lack of organization on their part the benefit did not accrue to the Islanders. They were exploited by the mainland merchants in marketing their produce. With the use of mechanised boats and modern methods since 1962 the catches have increased and with the formation of a Co-operative Society in the Island, the people are getting a fair price for their produce and also consumer goods at a reasonable price. This has considerably benefited them economically.

Minicoy has now a twenty-bed hospital started in 1960 with two Medical Officers. It has a Senior Basic School and two Junior Basic Schools, of which one is exclusively for girls. About 700 students attend these schools. Electricity was introduced into this Island in 1962.

In view of its strategic location in the Arabian Sea, Minicoy has a lighthouse since 1885. The wireless station was opened in 1944. Minicoy has also a number of scientific research stations like the Pilot Balloon Observatory, the Radio Zonde Ravine Observatory and the Tidal Observatory.



## FISHERIES OF THE LACCADIVE ISLANDS

SCALE 1 INCH = 30 NAUTICAL MILES

INDIA

Mangalore

Kasaragod

BASSAS  
DE  
PEDRO  
BANK  
1928  
T W

BALIAPANIYAM REEF  
TR.HL.HR.DS.CN.DN  
Sh.Br.Wh.Mn.Kf.Tn.Rc.

BYRAMGORE REEF  
TR.HL.HR.CN.DS.LL.  
Sh.Br.Wh.Mn.Kf.Tn.Rc.

CHETLAT

BITRA 1002  
HR.CN.DS.TR.HL.  
Ra.Kf.Tn.Wh.Sh.Mn.  
1017

KILTAN  
TR.HL.HR.CN.DS.LL.  
BT.DN.RL.BN.RT.  
Wh.Sh.Mn.Ra.Kf.Tn.

PEREMUL PAR

KADMAT  
HR.TR.HL.LL.BT.  
CN.DS.DN.RT.  
Wh.Sh.Br.Tn.Gr.

AMINI  
HR.TR.HL.LL.  
Wh.Sh.Ra.Kf.Tn.

ELICALPENI  
TR.HL.HR.  
Kf.Wh.Mn.

BANGARAM TINNAKARA

AGATTI  
BT.CN.DN.RL.HR.HL.TR.  
Gr.Br.Sh.Wh.

PITTI (Bird Is.)

ANDROTH  
TR.RL.HL.HR.DS.DN.  
TN.BT.FF.LL.CN.  
Mn.Ra.Kf.Sh.Mr.  
Tn.Wh.Sf.Gr.

KAVARATTI  
TR.HR.HL.RL.CN.DN.  
DS.BN.BT.RT.FF.  
Wh.Tn.Br.Sh.Gr.Sf.Mn.Ra.

SURELI VALIAKARA  
SURELI CHERIYAKARA  
TR.LL.RL.HL.HR.DS.  
DN.BT.CN.FF.  
Tn.Wh.Mr.Ra.Mn.Br.Sf.

CHERIYAM  
KALPENI  
HR.TR.RL.HL.DS  
RT.CN.DN.BT.FF.  
Mn.Br.Ra.Sh.Tn.  
Wh.Gr.Kf.

Discoloured Water

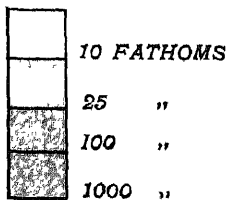
Obstruction

Investigator Bank

1245

MINICODY  
FF.BN.LL.TR.RL.HL.HR.  
DS.CN.DN.BT.RT.TR.  
Tn.Wh.Sf.Br.Sw.Sh.  
Lg.Lt.Mn.Rc.

## SEA LEVEL



ISOLATED DEPTHS  
BEYOND 1000 fms.  
1 FATHOM = 6 FEET

## FISH

Sym-bols	Name of Fish
Br.	Baracuda
Gr.	Gar fish
Kf.	King fish
Lg.	Lutjanus
Lt.	Lethrinus
Mn.	Manta
Mr.	Marlin
Ms.	Miscellaneous
Ra.	Rays & Skates
Rc.	Rock Cod
Sf.	Sail fish
Sh.	Sharks
Sw.	Sword fish
Tn.	Tunny
Wh.	Wahoo

## FISHING GEAR

Sym-bols	Name
BN.	Bait Catching Nets
BT.	Basket Traps
CN.	Cast Nets
DN.	Drift Nets
DS.	Drag Nets & Scare Line
FF.	Fish Farms
HL.	Hand lining
HR.	Harpooning
LL.	Long lining
RT.	Reef Channel Traps
RL.	Rod & Line
TN.	Trammel Nets
TR.	Trolling
TW.	Trawling

# FISHERIES IN LACCADIVES

Most of the fishes of economic importance of the Laccadives fall under the category of oceanic fishes to which belong the Tunas, Wahoo and Sailfish. Of lesser economic importance are the Lagoon fish like rock cods *Lethrinus*, *Lutjanus* and Kingfish. The Manta (or Devil-fish), Barracuda, Marlins, and Sword-fish are sporadic in their appearance. Sharks and Rays are ubiquitous.

Whereas the richest fishing along the mainland waters is located along the bottom of the sea (i.e. Prawns) in the Laccadives it is the surface and mid water regions that yield fruitful results. Prawns are non-existent and so are shoaling fish like Sardines and the Indian mackerel.

Sea bottom suitable for Trawling are as yet unknown or untried, except the experimental trawling by S. T. Lady Goshen in 1928. When such power boats and gear would be available for experiments, selected large areas of shelving banks like those surrounding Androth and the Investigator Banks north-east of Minicoy could be given a trial.

Broadly speaking the fishery areas of these Islands could be grouped oceanographically into three, viz., the Middle Group of Islands consisting of the Islands of Kavaratti, Agatti and Amini; the North Eastern Group of Islands consisting of Kiltan, Chetlat and Bitra; and the comparatively isolated islands of Minicoy, Kalpeni, Suheli, Androth and the Banks of Bassas de Pedro, Beliapani, Byramgore, Peremulpar, Eli-Kalpeni and Investigator Bank.

In the year 1928 the Madras Fisheries Steam Trawler "Lady Goshen" while surveying the trawling grounds (sea bottom fishing grounds) of the Arabian sea had operated over Basses de-pedro Bank (Munial Par) 60 miles north of Chetlat. As the sounding had revealed a very rugged bottom, bristling with coral growths, antipatharia, and Gorgonids the first trials were with only skeleton trawling gear, (ground Rope, Head Ropes and Otter Boards). Within an area thus cleared of obstructions a modified vigneron Dahl Net (Trawl Net more buoyant than normal gear by the addition of glass floats) was operated. The first haul was remarkably poor in fish. The cod end was encumbered with several types and species of Echinodermata (Star Fishes, Brittle stars and Holothuria). The last haul towards the southern end of the bank yielded good haul of King-fish (Carangidae, etc.).

The conclusion that could be drawn is that the sea bottom at coral ridden regions when properly selected and freed from obstructions would yield good hauls even with bottom mobile nets like the otter trawls.

It is noteworthy that the "Lady Goshen" did not operate any mid water or surface gear over the Bassas de Pedro Bank as all her operations were with Trawl Nets of the then standard patterns.

The belief has been current that the southern waters of the Laccadives between latitude 7° to 9° north are richer in fisheries particularly the Tunas than the more northern waters. To a certain extent this is confirmed by the fact that the waters around Suheli yielded comparatively richer catches of fish during the years 1961—1963.

Minicoy has been acknowledged to possess rich fisheries for the Tunnies, i.e. Skip Jack and Yellow Fin Tuna. Even during breaks in the south-west monsoon Mas Odies of Minicoy venture out from the Leeward shore (north eastern) and have been catching fish though in smaller quantities as compared to other seasons. At such times fishing at other Islands is confined to mostly their lagoons and the hauls have been poor.

The Tuna particularly Skip Jack (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) is by far the most important fish of the Laccadives. From time immemorial Skip Jack, filleted, boiled and smoked has commanded a very remunerative market as the Mas.

The newly started canning of Tuna (Pilot scheme inaugurated at Agatti December 1963) is the beginning of a new industry of even greater economic importance for the foreign market.

The popular esteem for different types of fish at different regions of the Islands are remarkably distinct. Minicoy Islanders prefer Tunnies to any other fish whether fresh or cured. People of Kalpeni Androth and other northern Islands esteem the sun dried meat strips of Kotar (*Dicerobates eregodu*) which is never liked at Minicoy. Shark meat is also popular among many northern Islands unlike Minicoy. Ayakoora both *Cybium* and *Acanthocybium* though very popular among all other Islands has not been recognised as such by Minicoy Islanders. This unreasonable aversion is being broken down slowly since the Pablos started operating here. The demand for Digu Mas (*Acanthocybium*) for midday meals in the schools and hostels at Minicoy is increasing day by day. Tamarind fish or Padda made out of fried or dried Digu Mas pickled in Vinegar and spices has caught on in popularity at Minicoy. It would be possible to popularise this cottage industry at all Islands.



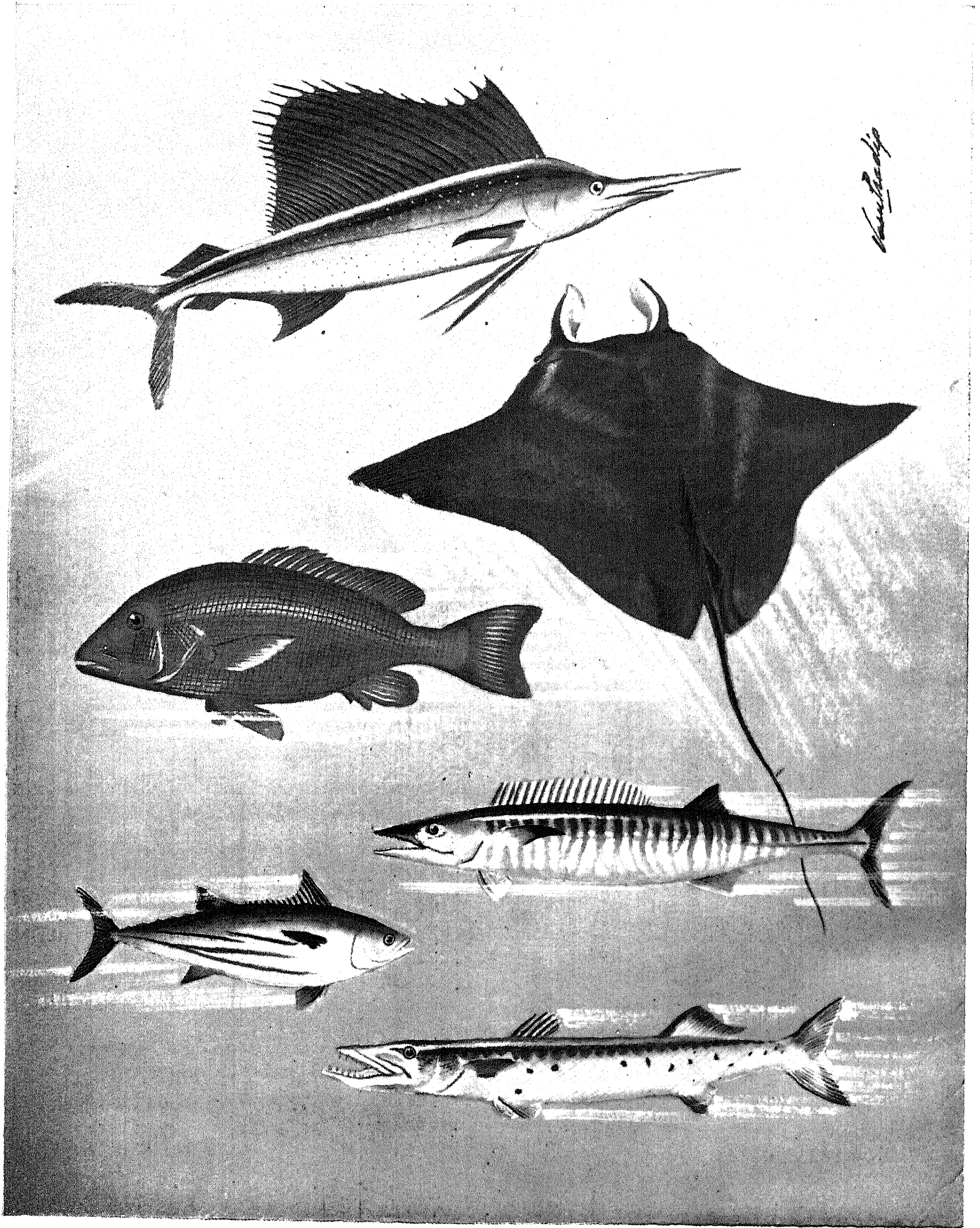
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Drawn at the Central Survey Office  
and printed by Photo-Offset at the  
Photo-Zinco Press, C. S. O., Madras.  
1965 (Saka Era 1887)

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## FISHES OF ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

### **TUNA - KATSUWONUS PELAMYS:** (*Left Bottom*)

The tuna of the variety known as skip jack (*Katsuwonus Pelamys*) is the most important fish in the Laccadives. Its season commences with September and lasts upto May. At Minicoy however the Fishermen affirm that even during the south-west monsoon skip jack shoal around their Island.

From time immemorial the smoked Tuna of Minico was most valuable item of export to Ceylon. The Islanders depend so much on this commodity that during years when its fishery is not very fruitful, famine conditions prevail at Minicoy.

Tuna are captured on Rod and Line from special Tuna boats of around 35 feet in length navigating under double lateen sails. Shoals are attracted to the surface by chumming with live bait. By skill full wielding of the bamboo rods mounted with special barbless hooks on Nylon traces the fish are deftly hooked and swung aboard the boats without disturbing the rest of the shoal.

Since 1963, Mechanised boats of the administration suitably modified with platform for the Anglers have commenced landing large hauls of tuna from widely separated areas around Minicoy, Agatti and Kalpeni.

### **WAHOO - ACANTHOCYBIUM SOLANDRI:** (*Right Middle*)

Although a near relation of the Ayakoora of the Coastal Belt this seer is peculiar to the Laccadives. Fishermen harpoon them from their small boats by decoying them towards the surface by playing a "Poimeen" of wood shaped like a flying fish (their favourite prey). The season is restricted to November to January with slight fluctuations at different Islands. The Pablos and other larger yailing vessels capture wahoo on trolling lines with a lure shaped like a squid made out of the young leaf of the coconut palm. Salted and dried wahoo commands a good price (Rs. 1-50 kg.)

### **MANTA OR DEVIL FISH (MANTA BIROSTRIS):** (*Right Top*).

Locally known as Kotar this is one of the largest of Rays and is captured by harpooning, even as large as 20 feet from one wing tip to the other. Having no pisonous spine (as in other rays) at the base of the tail it is comparatively harmless. Its food consists of plankton and other minute crustacca. However, its size gives it a great tenacity for life and the harpooned Kotar puts on a tough fight to the fishermen by towing the boat for hours till several harpoons and cutting knives finishes the struggle. It is noteworthy that the heart cut out from a dismembered Kotar was found to be alive and beating after hours of capture.

Kotar are found near the entrance to the lagoons during the months of December and January but the season commences during the N. E. Monsoon and upto February.

In all Islands except Minicoy its meat is held in great esteem. When fresh it is cooked into a rich savoury. It is also cut into strips washed in sea water and sun dried for later use.

### **RED SNAPPER - CHEMMALI (LUTIANUS SEBAE):** (*Left Middle*)

Lutianus Sebae has been illustrated here to represent as one of the several varieties of bottom feeding fish like Rock Cods, Sea Perch, etc. found over the fishing banks of the Laccadives. Lutianus and other allied fish are mostly caught on handlines from boats either anchored or drifting over these grounds. They are abundant over coral bottoms and the bait used is strips of meat cut from other fish and octopus.

Red snappers attain 2 feet in length. A few of them whose meat is very fatty are known as not very wholesome as food. Their fishing season lasts throughout the year but catches are best during fair weather.

### **SAIL FISH - (ISTIOPHRUS GLADIUS):** (*Left Top*)

Their vernacular name Olameen is very appropriate as when they are seen with only their dorsal fin above the surface. This looks like a floating palm leaf.

This fish the dream of all Big Gaine Angelers is at times a source of great annoyance to local hand lining fisherman. It takes the trolling lures and smashes the costly nylon by sheer weight as with the lure in its mouth it rockels 10 feet or more out of the sea and falls on the trace. It is mostly harpooned from small boats and landed after a tough fight by the Islander.

Its cousin the Sword Fish known as Kudira Meen is rarer in the Laccadives. It is formidable being a vicious fighter when hooked and even pierces the boats with its strong sword.



## LAGOON FISHES

A Large variety of the most colourful fish are abundant in the lagoons of the laccadive Islands. The illustrations are a few typical forms.

**SADDLE BACKED PARROT FISH** (*Thalassoma hebraicum*): (*Left top*)

Colours of the species could be very variable. Bark like teeth allows it to much living coral.

**BLUE SURGEON FISH** (*Acanthurus Lenconsternon*): (*Right top*)

Surgeon fishes have sharp spines at the base of their tail which could inflict deep cuts if the fish is carelessly handled. When alive the colours are more resplendant than in the illustration.

**STRIPED SURGEON FISH** (*Acanthurus Gineatus*): (*Left second row*)

— do —

**PENNANT FISH** (*Heniochus Acuminatus*): (*Right second row*)

Also known as Angel Fish and very prominent owing to its bands among the coral rocks it frequents.

**BLACK BAT FISH** (*Platax teria*): (*Left third row*)

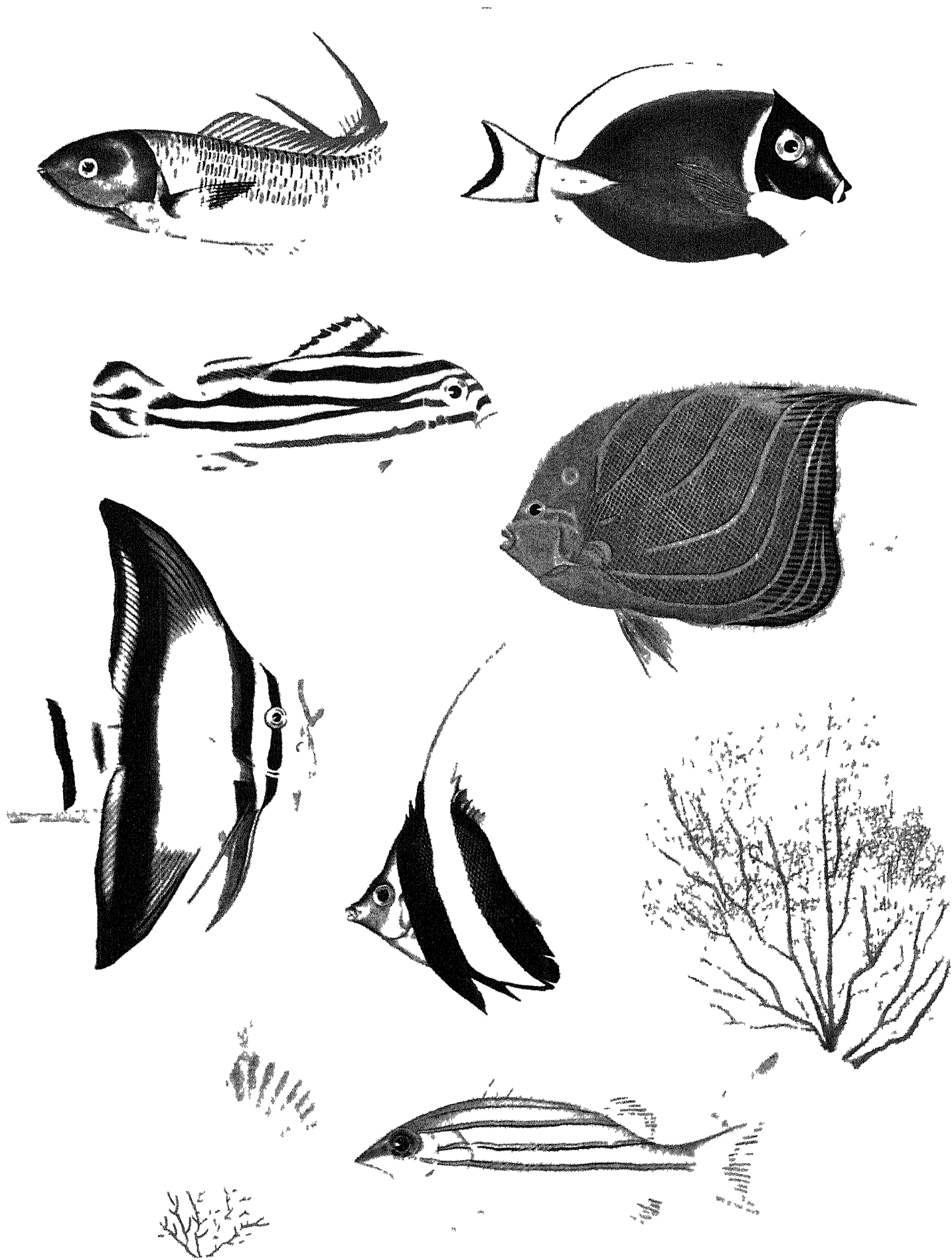
A more appropriate name is Angel Fish which when young are coloured yellow or orange. The adult when hungry or excited assumes a uniform black colour.

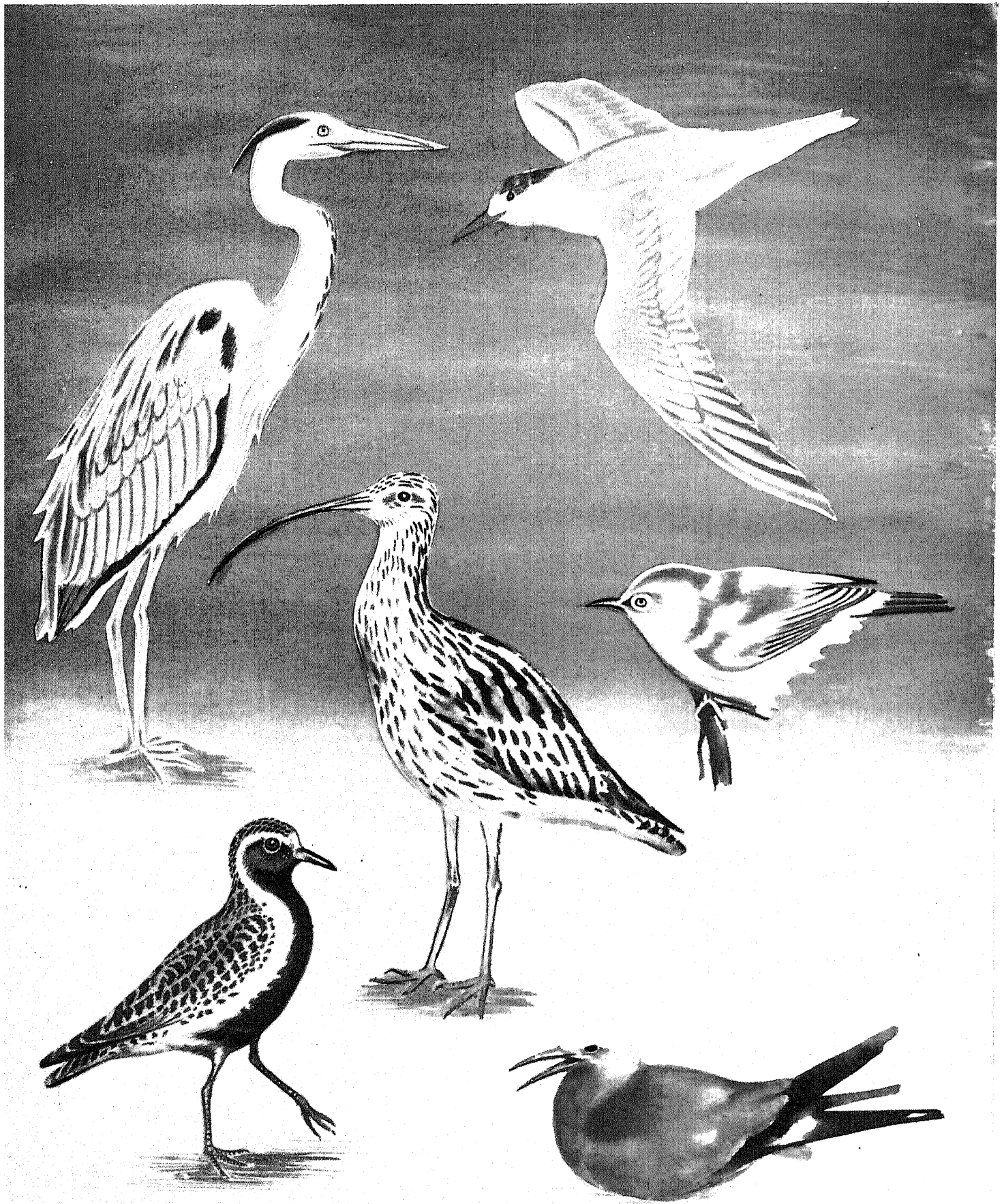
**BLUE RUG BUTTERFLY FISH** (*Pomacanthus Annupares*): (*Right third row*)

Though the colours are common-place when young, this fish with growth assumes beautiful tints.

**BLUE BANDED SNAPPER** (*Lutianus Kasmira*): (*Right bottom*)

Colour vary according to environments. Snappers close their mouth convulsively when caught.





Wm. H. P. 1910

## BIRDS

(*Ardea Cinerea*)

### **GREY HERON:** (*Left Top*)

As could be expected the Grey Heron which is capable of long flights is ubiquitous in the Islands—particularly at Minicoy, Kavaratti and Amini. At Minicoy the adjacent Island of Viringili has been their breeding ground for years past.

### **TERNS (STERNA SPP):** (*Right Top*)

There are several species of Terns and Noddies and allied birds found in the Islands particularly at isolated spots like the Bird Island of Pitti, the sand banks of Baliyapani and Cheriyanani. The illustration depicts one of the common varieties of Terns. Further details vide 6 Phillippine Noddy.

### **CURLEW (NUMENIUS ARQUATA):** (*Middle*)

Both Curlews and Whimbrels are found in the Islands during most of the year but whether they nest here has not yet been confirmed. Owing to the absence of Shikarees they move about with impunity even into the interior of the Islands to feed on the insect life (which is unusual for birds of the sand banks). They are captured in coconut fibre noose traps which Island boys are skilful in operating.

### **GOLDEN PLOVER (PLUVIALIS DOMINICA):** (*Left Bottom*)

Golden Plover and the Grey Heron are migrants during the cold weather frequenting the grassy flats and are much esteemed as food being snared in noose traps.

### **WHITE-EYE (ZOSTEROPS PALPEBROSA EGREGIA):** (*Right Middle*)

The "Fauna" of British India by Stuard Baker mention that the Zosterops found in some of the Islands of Laccadives are the same species and variety as in Ceylon. In Kavaratti where there are no crows to molest the nestlings there are large flocks which at daybreak move in dozens from tree to tree hunting for insects. The males sing a melodious song during the afternoons and the close of the day. White-eye is very fond of the nectar from coconut inflorescence and also steal the neera from the shells kept by the tappers on the toddy spikes. Nesting is during the monsoon sometimes on very low shrubs. During summer pairs of white-eye roost among the leaves of calophyllum from where they are easily captured by switching a powerful torch and dazzling their sight.

### **PHILLIPPINE NODDY (ANOUS STOLIDUS PILEATUS):** (*Right Bottom*)

Another bird allied to the Terns found in large numbers breeding at the Bird Island of Pitti is the Phillippine Noddy. Their eggs along with those of Terns used to be much relished by the Islanders.

The Terns, Noddies and several other Laridae breed at isolated Sand Banks, Reefs and Margins of Lagoons during their breeding seasons between April and September. They frequent beaches for feeding at Islands like Bitra where they are least disturbed by the Islanders. The high phosphate content of the top soil in most of the Islands is due to their droppings.

## SHELLS

### **HONDA CONE :** (*Left top*)

In the Laccadive many varieties of cone shells are found in perfect and bleached condition. The illustration tallies in colours with some of our specimen.

### **TULIP SHELLS:** (*Left second row*)

Like the murex they are harmful to bivalves shells. The illustration has the same colouration as those common in the Laccadives.

### **GIANT TUN:** (*Left third row*)

Most of the shells washed ashore particularly at Minicoy are badly bleached but soon after the monsoon perfect shells with the original gloss are collected by the Islanders.

### **LACE MUREX :** (*Left bottom*)

The murex family are well represented in the Laccadives. They are carnivorous feeding mainly on bivalves.

### **CAPRITS MUREX (Spiny Wood Cock):** (*Top middle*)

The popular name "Spiny Wood Cock" for the murex with an elongated axis is due to its profile which is similar to the head and beak of the bird "wood cock" which is allied to the snipe. While wading over the reefs and shallow, its spine causes troublesome injury to the sole of the collector's feet.

### **PACIFIC PINK SCALLOP (Only one wing at the hinge):** (*Right top*)

When the Administrator and party visited Chereabani reef on 21st October, 1964 it was noticed one of the eastern sand banks there were thousands of small scallops or wing shells ranging in size from half an inch to nearly one inch. They were coloured pink like the illustration and also a bright yellow. A few rare ones were white in colour. Being very fragile many in our collection were broken.

### **MEASLED COWRY:** (*Right second row*)

As is well known small cowry shells used to be valuable as coinage in the olden days. At present these smaller sizes are valued as ornamental beads for clothing at regions like Nagaland.

Large shells are abundant on the reefs and an important item in the collections of the Island women in all Laccadives. The colouration in the Laccadives range from dark brown to buff and even white with brown spots.

### **DWARF - OLIVE:** (*Right third row*)

Found in comparatively shallow waters the live animal when extended out of the shell completely covers it.

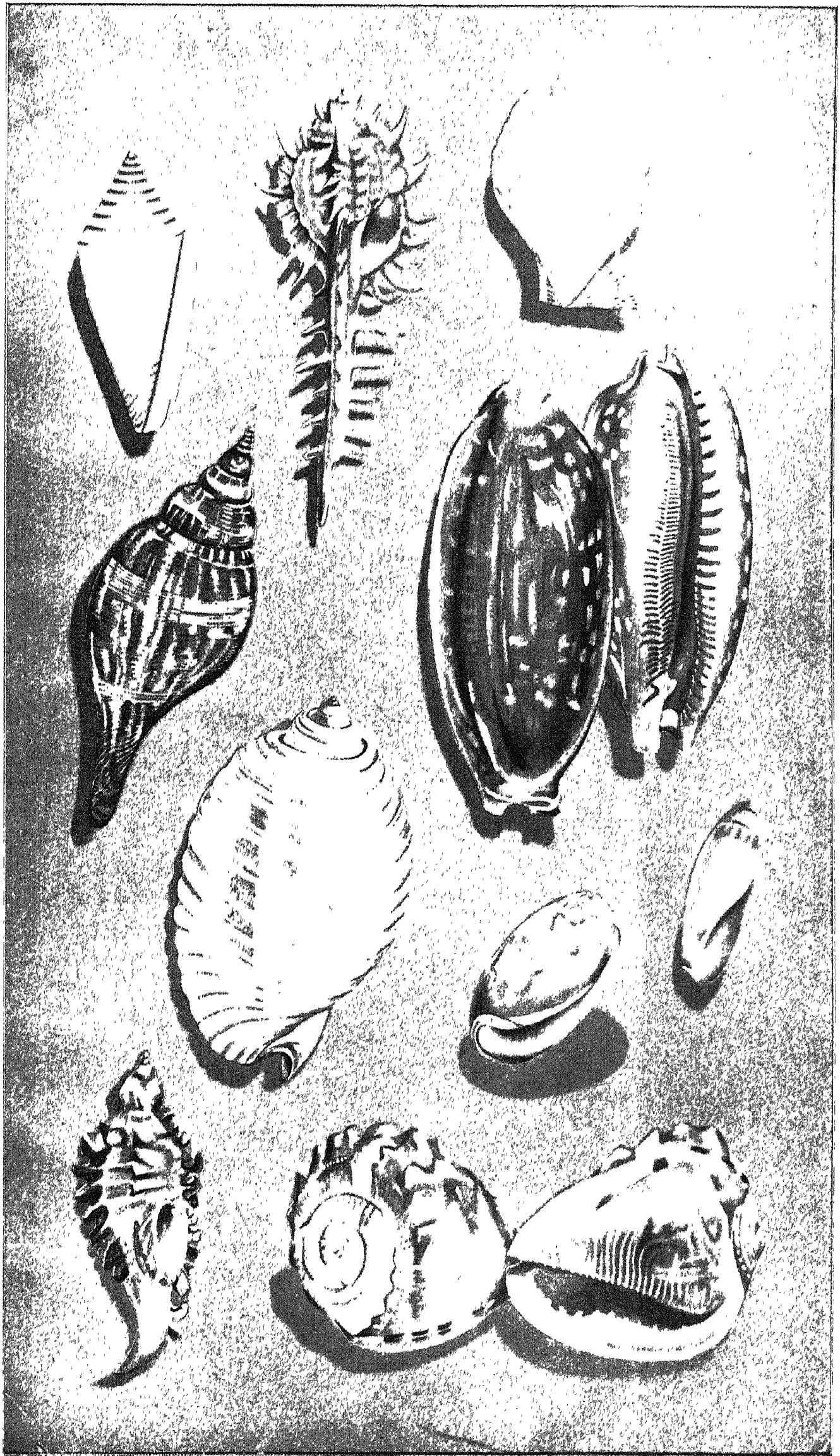
### **BUBBLE SHELLS:** (*Third row middle*)

As suggested by the name these are thin and brittle. They have two pairs of tentacles and are allied to the sea slugs.

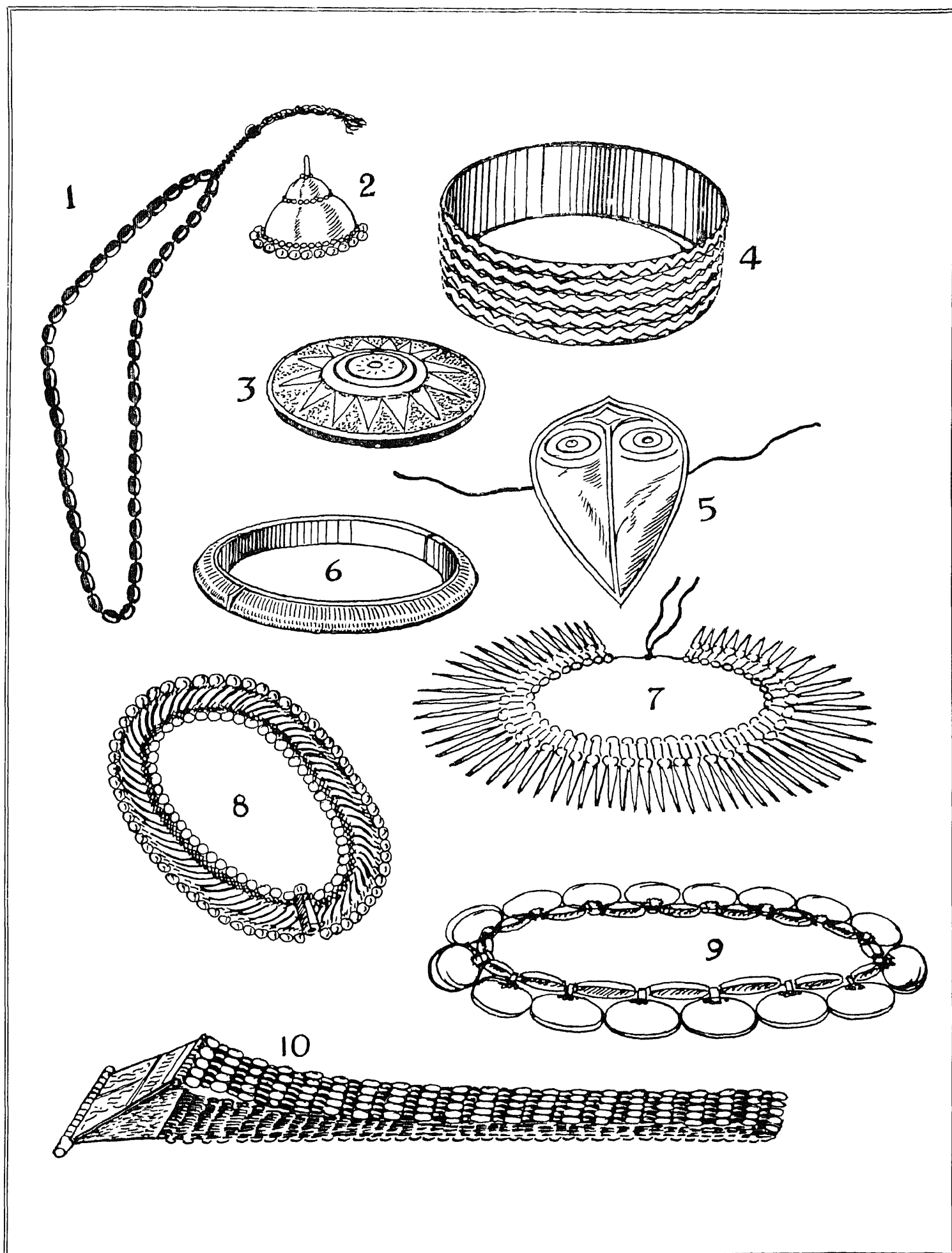
### **FLAME HEPNET:** (*Right bottom*)

One of the most popular gastropod shells collected in nearly all Islands. The reddish brown variety is most common and in some of the rarer ones dark brown and even black colourations are observed.









## JEWELS OF THE WOMEN OF THE ISLANDS

The women of the Islands like all women all over the world are fond of ornaments. All the savings of the family are turned into gold. There are Goldsmiths in most of the Islands. These are some of the typical jewels they wear.

1, 7 & 8 are Necklaces.

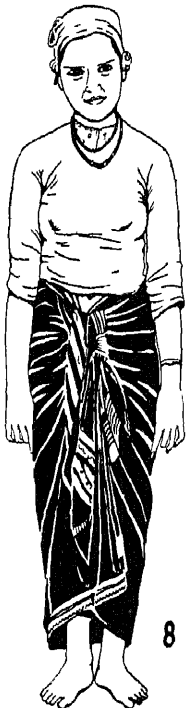
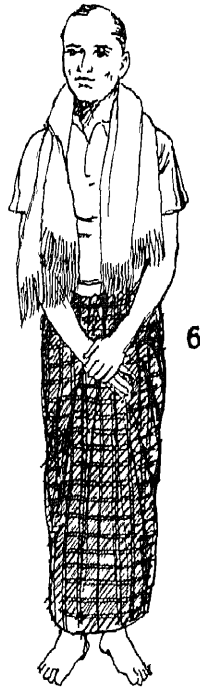
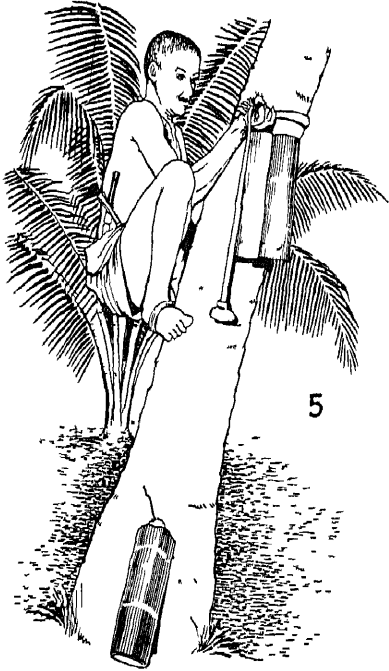
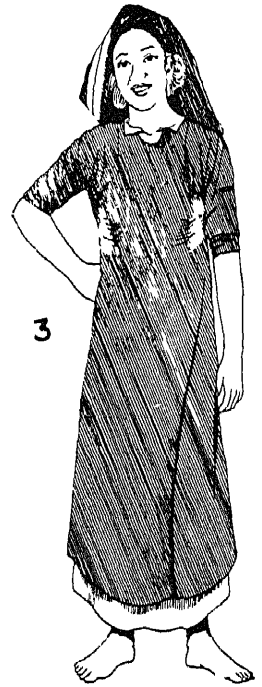
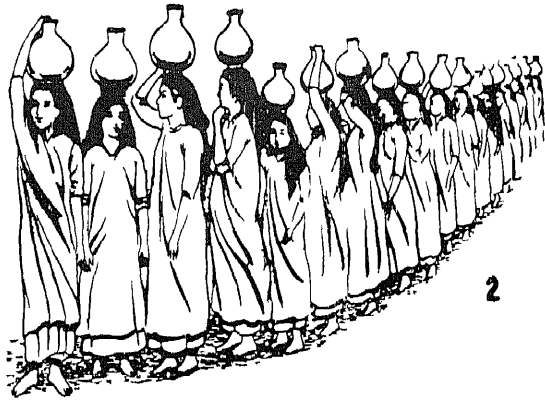
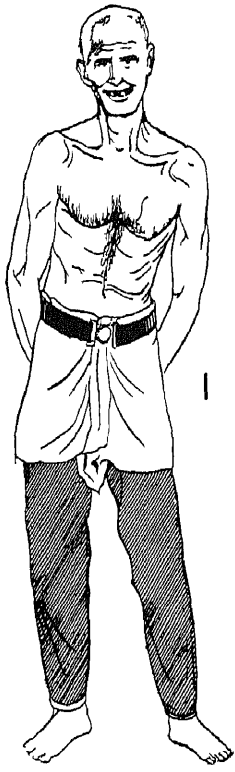
2, 3 & 4 are for the hair.

5 and 6 are Bangles.

9 is for the ankles and 10 is a belt.

All these can be of gold 9 and 10 could be of silver also.





# PEOPLE OF THE ISLANDS

*(Picture on the Left page)*

The people of the nine occupied Islands are similar while the last one, Minicoy, are different from the rest.

(1) Hard working, disciplined, sailor from Minicoy. While working he wears a long black pyjama, tight at the ankles. A white dhoti is folded and tied at the waist. Children till the age of 12 or 14 do not wear these pyjamas. The non-working class do not also wear pyjamas. This seems to be a convenient dress adopted for working. Their main occupation is Tuna fishing by the Pole and line method. Tuna is dried and sold mainly in Ceylon. With the coming of the mechanised boats and canning factory at Minicoy, the prosperity of the Island will go up. They are not interested in coconuts except for their home consumption.

(2) The women work very hard in Minicoy. Here a long line of them are proceeding to fetch water.

(3) A typical Minicoy woman in a long gown and veil. The gown is invariably of red colour and all the women wear the same type of gown and of the same colour. The richer class have silk one instead of the cotton. The curing and drying of the fish are carried out by women. They help in the construction of buildings, collection of fuel and today they attend schools in large numbers. They are graceful in their movements and those of the children who appear on the stage seem to perform with confidence, grace and charm.

(4) The women of the other Islands dress in their colourful lungies. They wear blouses, and cover their head with veil and occupy themselves mostly in preparing coir fibre and spinning them into yarn.

(5) The occupation of the Islanders of the nine Islands except Minicoy is preparing copra from the coconuts and jaggery from sweet toddy. Here an Islander is going up the coconut tree with his bamboo containers for collecting sweet toddy. Fishing is done in the other Islands for their own consumption. Their whole attention is on the preparation of Copra.

(6) A young man after working hours dressed for his evening stroll.

(7) It is said that the children learn to swim even before they learn to walk. Their toys are made out of parts of the coconut trees. They make little boats and play in the beautiful lagoon. Here a youngster is carrying a boat he has constructed and is off to the lagoon.

(8) A typical woman of the other Islands, with a veil, gold ear-rings, close fitting blouse and colourful lungy.

(9) A young girl from a rich family. She will soon be a bride. The ornaments are all of gold.

(10) The front view of the same girl. Her bangles, necklaces, ear-rings, etc. are all of gold. The belt around the waist could be of gold or silver.

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## BOATS

*(Picture on the next page)*

### 1. MAS ODI:

Ranging about 35' in length these highly specialised fishing boats are peculiar to Minicoy. They are beautifully streamlined and keeled for windward sailing; with two tall lateen sails of which the forward one is taller than the mizzen. These boats have a fishing platform at the stern where the Tuna rods are operated. A midships water circulates freely through bung holes and the live bait placed here can survive for long periods. Excess water is always bailed out. During peak fishing for Tuna these mas Odis capture upto 1000 skipjack during a day.

They could easily be mechanised with diesels as an auxiliary to the sails by building the hulls with frames, sternposts, shaft logs and engine bearers. A 35 footer could take a 10 horsepower diesel with the correct length of shaft.

### 2. ISLAND CARGO SAILING VESSEL:

These range in tonnage 15 to 50 and do not possess the excellent sailing qualities of the Mas Odis. They used to be built out of timber indigenous to the Islands (coconut and Terminalia catappa). The remarkable thing about this vessel is that coir rope is used for fastening most of the timbers with copper nails nowadays for the more vulnerable parts. Two long lateen sails are used along with one or more foresails or jibs. There is a cabin aft where crew and passengers could rest. They are mostly fair-weather sailors and are poor for windward work.

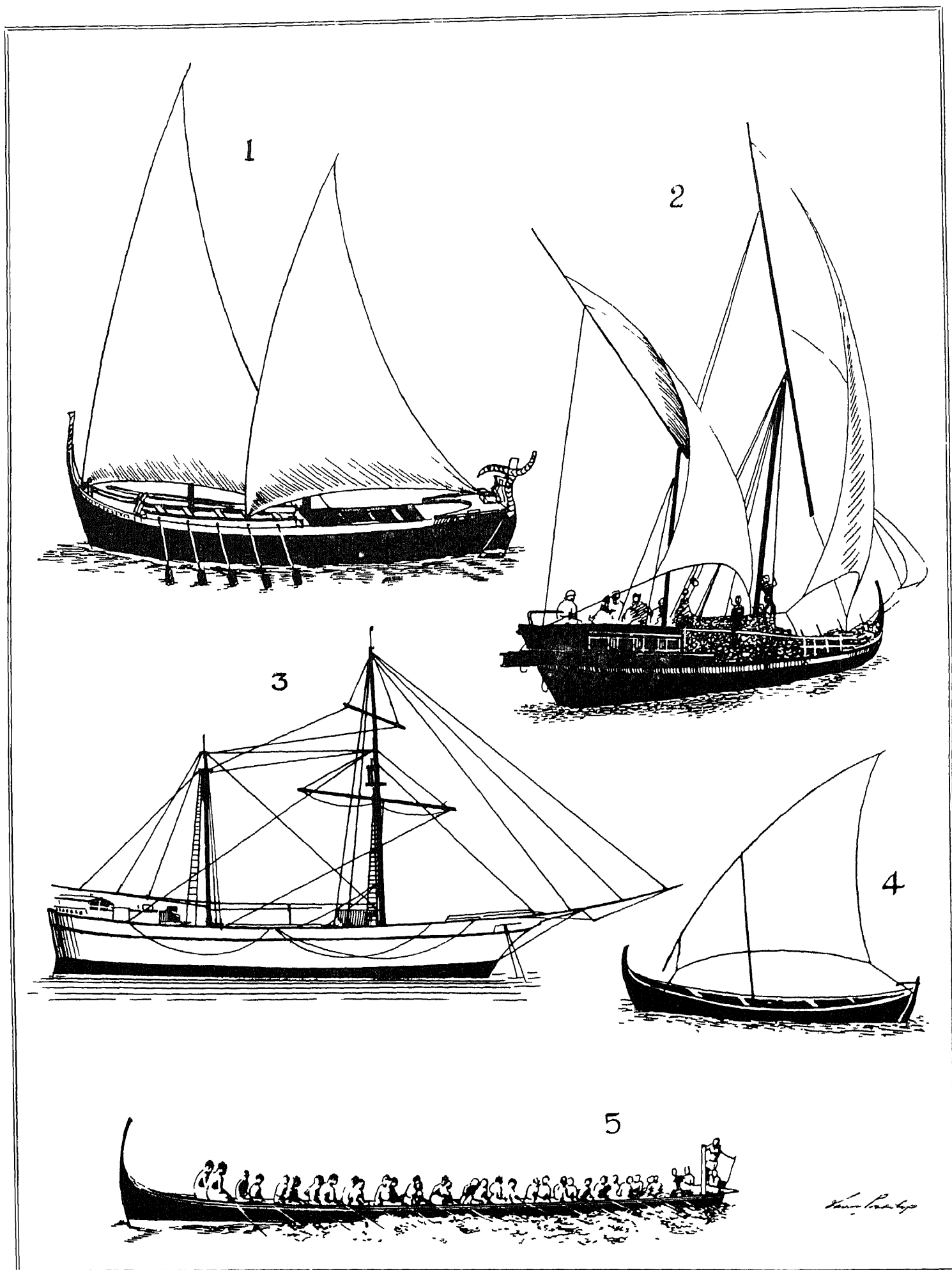
Their construction has to be thoroughly modified by using strong frames and avoiding the use of coir rope for mechanising. The location of the engine also has to be carefully planned to avoid squatting by the stern.

### 3. MINICOY CARGO VESSEL:

Very seaworthy sailing ships of the type of the early 15th Century 'Brigantine' extensively used for carrying cargo to the mainland in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. They have steering wheels, compass in binnacles and other accessories for long voyages. As could be seen the foremast takes square rigged sails like topsl Schooners.

### 4. TOPSL SHOONERS:

The fishing Thonis of the Islands are extremely light vessels ranging in length from 15 to 24 feet. The Islanders seem to have copied the lines of the spathes covering the coconut flowers in designing



these boats. The timbers are fastened by coir ropes and consists of many varieties of Island wood including well seasoned Bread fruit planks. Like Island cargo vessels they are not very good for sailing close to the wind but could easily be rowed by even a single fisherman for long distances around the lagoon. The most important fishing done is harpooning.

##### 5. RACING BOATS OF MINICOY:

Very graceful and beautifully designed rowing boats very narrow in beam and extremely long even above 40 feet specially designed for racing at Minicoy. These Islanders take a great pride in building and maintaining these boats which are taken out only for racing. The costliest marine paints are used in ornamenting them. At other times they are carefully stored in special boat sheds.





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